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"A SHADY FIGURE SWIFTLY BUT SILENTLY PASSED HER."

A Brave Heart; or, Startlingly Strange.

BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT CAPTAIN MORDAUNT THOUGHT ABOUT THE NEW GOVERNESS.

"I HAVE just come from the school-room, no other," said Captain Mordaunt, stretching himself lazily on a couch in front of the blazing fire. "I was curious to have a peep at Mary's governess."

"That was very imprudent of you, Jack. Miss Tremlowe is not accustomed to a six-foot Guardsman with an eyeglass in her domain; and as she is very shy and retiring, the innovation could not have been much to her taste."

"Oh, I dispensed with the eyeglass, and made my six feet as little intrusive as possible by sitting down."

"You sat down—in the school-room!" cried Mrs. Mordaunt, in a tone of deep dismay. "Really, Jack, you know how servants talk. Why, by noon to-morrow it will be reported all over Burlingham that you are making desperate love to the new governess!"

"I don't believe anything of the sort; and if they did, it would be

a compliment to my good taste, for she is the very prettiest girl I ever saw in my life."

"You seem to have made good use of your time," observed Mrs. Mordaunt, dryly.

"Oh, I stayed there a good half-hour, I am sure. Harry wanted me to hear how much she had improved in her reading, and I couldn't be so unnatural as to refuse. Then she insisted that I should mend a doll's chair, and Miss Tremlowe had to heat some glue, so that it proved quite a long job. And upon my word I am afraid I didn't hurry much, for Miss Tremlowe held the broken leg while I set it; and her eyelashes were so splendid—"

Mrs. Mordaunt interrupted him by an impatient movement.

"Miss Tremlowe is under my charge, and I won't have any trifling there. Mrs. Tremlowe—who is, by the by, a slight connection of your father's—has gone to Italy for the winter with her other daughter. As an officer's widow, with little besides her pension, you may imagine it was very difficult to take one daughter, and impossible to take two. Clara—Mary's governess—was determined her sister should have this one chance of life, and came and engaged herself to me, without the others knowing."

"By Jove! that was fine!" put in the captain, interjectionally.

"Mrs. Tremlowe was dreadfully distressed, of course. But it was the only way of managing their journey, as she saw, and so she gave in. But she brought her daughter to me herself, and told me that Clara was innocent and unsophisticated as a child, and a really good girl, but that she had a certain peculiarity of manner at times she did not understand herself, and could not account for; but if I would make allowances for that, she was sure I should be more than satisfied in other ways."

"Have you ever noticed that peculiarity?"

"Well, for the first three months I did not; but last week I certainly did notice that she seemed in a strange, dreamy state, and had quite a different expression in her eyes to anything I had seen before. But as she attended to her duties with perfect regularity, and was only a little odd and silent, I did not see any need to speak to her on the subject."

"I admire Miss Tremlowe personally more than any woman I ever saw, but she is quite safe from me, and you may make your mind perfectly easy. And now I'll go and smoke a cigar."

Mrs. Mordaunt had been left a widow young, and she might have remarried often had she chosen; but her heart was wrapped up in her children, and she had no thought to spare from them. Her daughter, who was the elder of the two, married at eighteen, and, to her mother's great grief, went to India with her husband, where she died just after the birth of her little girl. Captain Barrett followed her in a few months, but not until he had made all the necessary arrangements for his child to be taken to Burlingham, where he knew that she would have a happy home, and be a comfort, besides, to the bereaved mother.

The estate and house really belonged to Captain Mordaunt, and he took possession of it amidst great rejoicings when he came of age. But he preferred a soldier's life to that of a country squire; and as Mrs. Mordaunt had a large jointure, and a private fortune of her own besides, she lived at the Hall and kept it up in pretty much the old style—the rearing of little Mary, and her son's occasional visits, being the great pleasures of her life.

But the time came when little Mary must begin to learn, and Mrs. Mordaunt looked about her for a very young governess, who would be a companion as well as a teacher for the child, and not be above dressing her dolls and sharing her games.

It seemed as if Fate had befriended her in sending Clara Tremlowe, for though well informed, and perfectly ladylike, she was still quite a child in some things, and soon managed to win little Mary's heart.

Things went on very happily for three months, and then came that strange week of which Mrs. Mordaunt had spoken to her son—when the girl's manner was so odd and dreamy that the elder lady could not understand her at all, and would have been alarmed had not Mrs. Tremlowe assured her that this arose from a nervous state of health, and would soon be remedied by an extra glass of wine every day, and a few doses of tonic.

Indeed, under this treatment, Miss Tremlowe soon became her old bright self again; and when Captain Mordaunt arrived at the Hall, the only trace you could see of her illness—if

illness it could be called—was the purple shade under the violet eyes, and a somewhat drawn look about the lips.

Little Mary and Miss Tremlowe always dined at Mrs. Mordaunt's luncheon-hour, and this was generally a pleasant meal for all three of them; but somehow it was not so agreeable now that the captain had come home—that is to say, to two out of the quartette.

The captain himself was charmingly gay and talkative; little Mary as happy as a bird, ready to laugh at all his jokes before they were made; but Mrs. Mordaunt herself looked grave and anxious, and Miss Tremlowe never opened her lips.

Captain Mordaunt, to do him justice, meant to be just properly polite and attentive to his niece's pretty governess; but her silence and abstracted manner piqued his curiosity, and he found himself taking far more interest in her than was at all necessary.

"Confound it!" he would say to himself sometimes. "What is it in the girl's face makes it so impossible to keep one's eyes off her? I have seen the handsomest women in England—ay, and flirted with many of them too—but they never had this sort of effect on me; so it can't be her beauty. Upon my word I believe she is uncanny, and will bewilder us all if we don't take care, and then ride away on a broomstick."

That evening he dined out; the next morning he went off shooting quite early, and did not return until late; but that night an incident occurred which harassed and perplexed him cruelly.

Mrs. Mordaunt had a troublesome headache, and retired to her room quite at ten.

"I shall just smoke a cigar, and then I shall turn in myself," said Jack, yawning. "I've been over a good deal of rough ground to-day, and am regularly done up. Besides, poor old Beauchamp is such a confounded bore, being in his company is a labor in itself. I wonder why such bores as that are allowed to live; no one wants them—not even their wives."

"Don't be scandalous, Jack," said Mrs. Mordaunt, laughing. "You know quite well that Mrs. Beauchamp is a most devoted wife."

"Like Hamlet's ghost, I could a tale unfold; but as you object to scandal, I had better, perhaps, be silent."

"Perhaps you had," she answered, gayly; "unless you think that open confession is good for the soul."

"I wish I hadn't more to answer for in any quarter than I have in that," he said, suddenly grave. "Do you know, mother, I am afraid I have been a terrible trifier. There was that little girl down at Felixstowe—you can't think how her face has haunted me ever since I have seen Miss Tremlowe, and yet they are not really alike. I do think the poor child was fond of me," he added, abstractedly; "and she looked so fragile, I have often feared since that our parting must have injured her. But, you see," he continued, as if excusing himself, "it was so odd for a girl to be living alone in a farmhouse, without any of her own people about her. Don't you think so?"

"Decidedly odd. What was her name?"

"Upon my honor, although I saw her daily for a month, I couldn't tell you to save my life. She said I might call her May, and somehow it never occurred to me to say 'May what?' or ask any questions. I really was foolishly infatuated for the nonce—so foolishly, indeed, that if Anderson, seeing how the land lay, had not carried me off to Norway in his yacht, I honestly believe I should have married her off-hand."

"Without knowing her name?"

"I daresay. A man is capable of any folly at such a time; and I should have known her name afterward," added the captain, dryly.

"I have such confidence in you that I feel sure you would never really marry any one but a lady. But men will be men, I suppose."

"I suppose they will," he answered, with a comical smile. "Really, mother, you are uncommonly brilliant to-night, in spite of your headache!"

"Don't be saucy, sir!" she said; and went, laughing, off to bed.

When Captain Mordaunt got into his "den," as he called his smoking-room, he filled his pipe, and then ensconced himself in a remarkably luxurious arm-chair, and fell into a deep reverie.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed aloud, presently.

"What makes me think so much of that poor little girl to-night? It is not an episode in my life, as mother calls it, that is pleasant to dwell upon, for she loved me, poor little thing! I remember how pretty it was to see the flush and

smile with which she always greeted me; and, after all, it was a poor, lame excuse I gave for my sudden departure, because, if people were talking about our daily walks and meetings, there was an easy way of stopping their tongues. I am afraid I didn't behave well; nay, I am sure I did not. I wonder what has become of her!"

He shook the dust out of his pipe, and rose to his feet.

"Anyhow, I may as well go to bed now. Hark!" and he turned his head toward the window, listening intently.

"By Jove!" he said, his eyes firing; "those confounded poachers have had the insolence to beard me in my den! Smith said they had cheek enough for anything. I'll soon let them know that sort of thing won't go down with me."

And he opened a drawer in his secretaire, and took out a revolver, which he examined carefully, and then put it into his breast-pocket.

Captain Mordaunt strode off hastily in the direction where he had certainly heard a gun fired a couple of minutes before. He could neither see nor hear any signs of his enemies, and was hurrying home to bed, when his footsteps were suddenly arrested by seeing a tall, slight figure on in front of him.

It was quite light enough to see that this figure belonged to a young woman. She was draped from head to foot in a dark cloak, and the hood was drawn over her head.

Suddenly she turned round, as if she had an instinctive feeling that some one was following her, and displayed the beautiful, pale features of little Mary's governess, Clara Tremlowe.

The young Guardsman started as if he had been shot, and looked after her, as she turned round again, in unutterable dismay.

He must have been mistaken. A momentary resemblance between herself and one of the maids had deceived him. Anyhow, whoever it might be, she preferred not to be recognized, it appeared, for she sped swiftly back to the house, and seemed to disappear through one of the lower windows, so far as Captain Mordaunt could judge. But when he came near the spot where he had first seen her, he saw something white glisten on the ground, and picked up a pocket-handkerchief, delicately scented, and apparently of fine texture.

Thrusting this into his pocket, to be examined presently, he went on to the place where the mysterious figure had disappeared, and found there was certainly a passage-window close by. It was locked and barred from the inside, but that, of course, she might easily have done when she got in. Still there was no trace of footsteps on the neatly-raked garden, and he did not much fancy that she could have jumped the intervening space between the path and the window, incumbered as she was with her drapery.

However, the pocket-handkerchief might possibly help him to elucidate the mystery, and once back in his den again, he scrutinized it with great attention. It bore no mark; but if it did not betray its owner's name, it showed very clearly that she was not a common person, for only a refined lady would have cared for such dainty simplicity.

CHAPTER II.

MISS TREMLOWE KEEPS HER OWN COUNSEL.

MISS TREMLOWE and her charge always breakfasted in the school-room, and there Captain Mordaunt dared not intrude, so that he had to wait until luncheon time for his grand maneuver.

He took care to be in the dining-room when she arrived, and watched her as she walked with a slow, languid step to her place.

As she bowed to him in passing to her seat, she lifted her glorious eyes momentarily to his face, and smiled the most provoking smile in the world, because it was so utterly incomprehensible. Finally she sat down with a demure air, and seemed to forget Captain Mordaunt's very presence until he held out the handkerchief, and said, "Is that yours, Miss Tremlowe?"

"Oh, yes, it is indeed!" she answered readily. "Thank you very much. But where did you find it?"

"I found it in the park," he answered, watching her narrowly.

"In the park?" she repeated, with an air of genuine surprise. "Surely, you are mistaken? I have not been there for three days!"

"Really!" was all he said; but what he thought was, "You are the coolest customer I ever saw; but you mustn't suppose you are going to fool me!"

Mrs. Mordaunt was talking to Mary, her back

being turned to the table, and so Jack bent forward and said softly, "Weren't you there last night?"

She stared at him with innocent amazement. "Me there last night! You must be dreaming, Captain Mordaunt! Nothing would induce me to put my foot out of doors after dark; I should die of fright."

Mrs. Mordaunt turned around at this moment, and nothing more was said, but Jack's curiosity was piqued to know how long and how well she would keep up the fiction.

A week had passed away, and although Captain Mordaunt had tried in every way to find an opportunity of speaking to Miss Tremlowe alone, hitherto he had been constantly balked.

And yet every night he had smoked his pipe on the terrace instead of in his den, and had kept a wary eye on the window where he had seen the dark figure disappear.

But the shutter remained hermetically sealed, and he looked in vain for her tall, graceful figure in the moonlight.

Miss Tremlowe looked all the better for denying herself that little distraction.

There was even a faint bloom on her cheeks now, and her eyes had lost the dreamy, far-away look they had worn before. She seemed to have come back to the world, and also its vanities, for she had little gold bells in her ears that tinkled coquettishly whenever she moved, and the pale blue bow at her throat was another innovation of equal merit in Captain Mordaunt's fastidious eyes.

"If that girl were a flirt she would make a fool of any man she liked," he said to himself. "Even as it is, I should hardly care to be exposed to too much temptation."

This was a wonderful admission for the gallant captain, who had always prided himself on his impenetrability until he met the nameless young lady in the Kentish farm-house. Was it possible he was going to be such a fool as to fall in love again, and in the same unfortunate way? Not if he could help it. He would try the effect of a week in town, and get his mother to have the Wimborne girls in the house when he came back.

Grace Wimborne would take good care he didn't think of any one but her while she stayed, at any rate.

He made this suggestion to his mother at dessert that evening, and as her pet plan was to make a match between her son and Grace Wimborne, she welcomed it very cordially.

"I am so glad you have proposed it, Jack," she said. "It is such a pleasure to see those dear girls! What day shall you return from town?"

"On the tenth. I shall be back in time for dinner, so you might ask the Wimbornes for that day. And let us have Rogers, too, by all means, for he'll keep Anastasia amused while I flirt with Grace."

"My dear Jack, I wish you would try to be serious in that quarter. You know how dearly I long to see you married and settled down," observed Mrs. Mordaunt, plaintively. "Besides, at twenty-eight it is really time to take to yourself a wife, and leave off trifling."

"A woman who has been brought up so frivolously never does settle down. When she marries, she takes to dangerous intriguing, and flirts secretly instead of openly. Well, I have it in me to be furiously jealous of a woman I cared for; and, moreover, I shouldn't fancy having my honor dragged through the mire. I can't always answer for myself when I am roused, and I honestly believe that a man has a right to kill his wife if she is unfaithful to him. So you see, mother, it is safer for me not to marry Miss Grace Wimborne."

"But you know, Jack, that a flirt girl often makes a very devoted wife."

"Does she? I bow to your superior wisdom, mother, but I would rather not try the experiment. I have not sufficient enterprise."

Mrs. Mordaunt hardly felt that she could say any more. But, as Grace Wimborne was coming to stay in the house, she thought she might leave it to her to cultivate the seed that she had sown, and meant to take care they were a good deal together.

Captain Mordaunt went off to town the next day, and it was really quite pretty to see how he looked up at the school-room window, and kissed his hand to little Mary, even when he was half-way down the avenue.

But, then, Jack was a most excellent uncle, as every one knew.

Captain Mordaunt stayed four days in town, and was never so bored in all his life before.

On the fifth day he could bear himself no longer, and went back to Burlingham, and feeling

very like a school-boy going home for the holidays. His mother was greatly surprised to see him, of course, but she asked no questions. Had he not a perfect right to go and come as he liked?

He brought little Mary a wonderful doll, which said "Papa" and "Mamma," and could be dressed and undressed at pleasure, having appropriate costumes for all occasions. It was pretty to see little Mary's delight, and to note, also, how Miss Tremlowe brightened into interest and animation over the various toilettes, until her starry eyes were one sparkle, and she actually laughed as gayly as little Mary.

He had never heard her laugh before, and was charmed. In the first place, because she showed a row of small, even teeth, as white as pearls; in the second place, because her laugh was neither forced, affected, or frivolous, and trilled out sweetly and spontaneously like a child's.

She appeared to forget his very presence—which was not exactly flattering, perhaps; still, he liked her all the better for it, as showing her entire unconsciousness.

Grace Wimborne would have been making eyes at him all the time, and fishing for compliments.

But he dared not stay long. He was only surprised that Mrs. Mordaunt had not been after him as it was, for she had got very much into the habit lately of paying little visits to his den to see if he were there, and following him if she saw no sign of him. For Mrs. Mordaunt was thoroughly conscientious, and was resolved that her son should not have the very smallest flirtation with Mary's governess.

But a little accident will sometimes defeat all our precautions; and so it happened that night. Mrs. Mordaunt went out to dinner, and as her son had not been expected home so soon, she had declined the invitation for him.

Of course, he could have gone if he had chosen in spite of this, and been pretty sure of a welcome; but he did not choose, and so there was an end of that matter.

But as the school-room was at the opposite end of the house to Jack's den, and Miss Tremlowe never left it of an evening, Mrs. Mordaunt went away with a tolerably easy mind.

However, it so happened that Miss Tremlowe had no book to read that evening, and feeling too depressed either to work or practice, she suddenly decided to make an excursion into the library in search of something that would help her to while away the solitary hours.

Burlingham Hall was an old place, and the passages were long and draughty, so she enveloped herself in a white Shetland shawl, drawing one corner over her head, in a picturesque fashion, and sallied forth.

The library was always well lighted and warmed, as it was Captain Mordaunt's recognized sitting room when he was at home, and he received all his visitors there, so that she did not trouble to take a lamp.

The library door was ajar, and pushing it, she went in. To her surprise and dismay, Captain Mordaunt rose quickly from his seat and came toward her, saying, in a cordial tone, "I was just thinking of you, Miss Tremlowe, and am glad to find that thinking of a person is as good as speaking of them, and assures his or her appearance. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Thank you, I only want a book," she said, speaking composedly, although the lovely flush abided on her cheeks. "The evenings are rather long now."

She found that this clause of her speech was a mistake, when he answered eagerly, "Yes, the evenings are very long when one is alone. Doesn't it seem absurd, when you think of it, that there are two lonely people in one house who would be much more cheerful if they passed the evenings together; and yet society is so constituted that if they did, all the old women's tongues would begin to wag at once! How do you account for reasonable human beings allowing themselves to be held in such bondage?"

"I have seen so little of the world that I can't account for it at all," she replied, with her sweet, rare smile. "But I can imagine that a great many things which are not wrong might be inexpedient."

"I am glad of that!" he exclaimed. "For instance—pardon me for speaking plainly—you would not consider it quite expedient, would you, for a young girl to walk out alone at night when the whole household was in bed? Granted that she intended no harm, still she would be foolish to lay herself open to misconception, would she not?"

"Certainly," said Miss Tremlowe, lifting her large, clear eyes innocently, to his face. "But

do you know any girl who is so wickedly imprudent, then?"

He looked straight at her with eyes that would fain pierce to her very soul, and she submitted to his scrutinizing tranquilly, with undrooping eyelids—not bold or defiant, but simply secure and ignorant.

Captain Mordaunt knew something of women and their ways, and it seldom took him more than an hour to gauge them pretty accurately, but this one baffled him completely.

She must be the most consummate actress in the world, since he had seen her in the park with his own eyes, and she took the tone now that it was an impossible thing to do.

He returned to the charge determinedly.

"I know it is no business of mine, Miss Tremlowe, and you may think it very impertinent of me to interfere, but I should like to give you a word of good advice if you would allow me. I am a man of the world; I have seen a good deal of life; and though some people may think I don't care for the graver side of it, I can take a very serious view of things on occasion."

"Oh, I hope we all do," she said, with an air of wondering what this long prelude meant.

"And if I saw a young girl exposing herself to danger from thoughtlessness, or through some bad influence, would it not be very wrong of me to keep silence?"

"Of course, it would," she answered, readily.

"But what do you mean?"

"I mean that I saw you in the park myself the night you dropped your pocket-handkerchief."

"Saw me?" she repeated, staring at him with a half-offended, half-incredulous air. "I never did such a thing in my life! Why, I was actually afraid coming through the passages just now, alone, when there were lights everywhere, and every one was up."

Captain Mordaunt was provoked at her denial; the more so that he found himself almost believing her against the evidence of his own eyes, and he could not help saying, with as much severity as significance, "Perhaps you did not expect to be alone in the park?"

She flashed at him a glance full of scorn.

"I had forgotten that I was only Mary's governess, and, therefore, a fit subject for any man's impertinences!" she said; and without so much as glancing his way, she walked from the room.

And Captain Mordaunt would almost have believed he must have been mistaken, but, taking his walk on the terrace that night, he saw the tall figure of Clara Tremlowe emerge suddenly from the shadow of the mansion, and glide swiftly toward the wood.

CHAPTER III.

GRACE WIMBORNE SEES A GHOST.

At first Captain Mordaunt was so overcome with rage and indignation at Miss Tremlowe's audacity, he turned his back upon her literally and metaphorically, and walked toward the house.

But men have their curiosity as well as women; and he was anxious to see how she would behave when she met him face to face, and no further denial was possible.

So he wheeled sharply round again, and was about to follow her, when he found she had disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as before.

He examined the spot where he had last seen her—he even went into the churchyard close by, and peered behind the gravestones. As a last resource he tried the church door; but that was securely fastened, and was, besides, about the last place in the world where a timid girl would take refuge, or a lover would care to keep tryst.

It was so mysterious, Captain Mordaunt found himself wondering if she really could be canny, and he made up his mind he would keep out of her way as much as possible for the future.

By way of carrying his good resolution at once into effect, he returned indoors, and went straight up to bed. But, for the life of him, he could not sleep. It troubled him to think that the most innocent-looking girl he had ever seen was depraved at heart, untruthful, shameless, and, moreover, that she was obstinately persisting in a course that would bring ruin on her, and sorrow to her friends.

The next day Miss Tremlowe did not appear at luncheon, and Captain Mordaunt was grimly triumphant, and yet disappointed, too. His mother made no remark about her absence; but little Mary was more communicative, and informed him, in the course of the meal, that Miss Tremlowe had a dreadfully, dreadfully bad

headache, and she believed it had come from crying. He longed to question her, but dared not, especially as Mrs. Mordaunt said, gravely, "Mary, dear, you mustn't talk so much, or you will never finish your dinner; and you know you are going out with me this afternoon."

"But it is quite true, grandmamma."

"I daresay it is, my dear. Indeed, I am quite sure you would not have said so, otherwise; but, you see, it is not nice to tell us anything that happens up-stairs; it is like telling tales out of school."

"Is it wrong for grown-up people to cry then?" said little Mary, who liked to get at the bottom of things.

"Certainly not, my love. How can they help it when they have troubles? Only they don't always care to have it spoken about."

Mary pondered deeply, with her little head on one side, and then observed, in an exculpatory tone, "Miss Tremlowe didn't say I was not to tell."

Captain Mordaunt burst out laughing then.

"You see, mother, Mary doesn't understand those little refinements yet; it will all come in time, no doubt."

"Not unless we begin to teach her now," replied Mrs. Mordaunt, with some dignity; and seeing she was not well pleased at his interruption, Jack said no more.

The next day Lady Wimborne and her daughters arrived and from that moment Captain Mordaunt's freedom was gone. When he was not wanted to ride and drive with Grace, he had to entertain Mr. Rogers; and so completely tied was he, that it was quite a relief to get into his bedroom at night, and feel that he had the right, at last, to be alone.

He saw nothing of Miss Tremlowe all this while, although he thought of her more than pleased him.

Whenever there was company staying at the house, Mary dined in the school-room, and only came down-stairs for half an hour at a time, and then alone, so that Miss Tremlowe might have been non-existent for aught the Wimbornes knew to the contrary.

Mrs. Mordaunt had certainly invited the girl down the first two or three evenings, but she had begged so earnestly to be excused that she had not persisted. Indeed, Jack thought she was by no means sorry to have done a civil thing at so little cost.

But he often found himself wondering if the girl were not lonely, and if it did not occur to her sometimes as rather hard that she should have none of the pleasures and distractions so natural to her years.

He was standing one day at the window of the upper landing, waiting for the horses to be brought round, when he noticed the school-room door opening little by little, as if some one were listening behind.

He was exactly opposite that door, but the heavy folds of the red curtains concealed him from sight.

The window on the landing was a favorite halting-place with him, for two or three times already he had seen a slight, girlish figure emerge from the door opposite; and oftener still he had heard her dulcet voice coaxing, admonishing, and praising, but never raised in anger.

And yet she had a spirit of her own, too, as he happened to know.

But before he had had time to finish these reflections, the pretty, golden-brown head showed itself altogether, and Miss Tremlowe looked anxiously up and down the passage.

Perceiving no one, she ventured forth, and looked over the banisters at the group below. And as she looked her face changed, and an expression of great anguish and irrepressible passion dimmed its wondrous beauty.

First of all, passion had the mastery; then anguish routed passion and had it all its own way, for she bent her face onto her hands, and her whole frame shook with sobs.

Never in all his life before had Captain Mordaunt felt so puzzled or so interested. Perhaps curiosity and compassion together would have mastered his discretion, only that at this moment Miss Tremlowe fancied she heard a step, and darted back into the school-room.

At that moment Mrs. Mordaunt put her head up the stairs and called her son, and he went like a martyr, very much out of tune for the sort of conversation that would be expected of him for three mortal hours.

But he tried hard to talk nonsense, and quite fancied he was succeeding beautifully, when Grace turned to him, and said, with a petulant air, "You are awfully stupid to-day, Captain Mordaunt! What is the matter with you?"

"The fact of it is, I have a wretched head-

ache," he answered, coloring. "I suppose it is the weather."

"People are so fond of laying everything to the weather," she said. "I am sure it is beautifully bright and fine to-day!"

"Well, then, it was Admiral Dacre's old port last night, if you won't accept my first explanation."

"Or any other reason why," she said saucily. "I don't believe you have a headache at all, Captain Mordaunt."

"What then?"

"You didn't want to come for a ride!"

"In that case, I could have made some excuse and stayed at home, as you had Rogers to escort you; could I not?"

"Not comfortably to yourself, for you would have felt as if you had been remiss. I must do you the justice to say that you are a very attentive host."

"Thank you!" he answered, bowing down to his saddle-bow. "That was a very pretty compliment."

"I never pay compliments, Captain Mordaunt, I assure you. But I like to be just, even to my enemies."

"I hope you don't count me among your enemies."

"I have never had reason to do so yet," she answered coquettishly. "Indeed, I sometimes flatter myself that we are very good friends."

Here was an excellent opening for a man who wanted to propose! There was only to say that he aspired to a dearer name still, and the deed was done. But it seemed as if Captain Mordaunt were either very stupid to-day, or had no such intention, for he answered, gallantly, "I should not have been so presumptuous as to usurp that title, but since you permit me to aspire so high, I shall be very proud of my honors."

"Only mind you are not unworthy of them," she replied, with her sweetest smile; and, putting her horse into a canter, she made for the common.

Grace Wimborne was always what is called a dashing rider, but, after this conversation, she rode in such a wild, reckless fashion, that Captain Mordaunt's heart was in his mouth again and again. Her horse was well trained, but had an exceedingly delicate mouth, and she would give the reins a tug every now and then that made the animal spring forward, quivering with pain.

In vain he warned her—she only laughed defiantly—and, giving her horse its head, she flew past him like the wind. He did not follow her, for he saw that the horse was almost at the end of his patience, and that hearing another behind him would make him perfectly unmanageable.

He shouted to her to have a care, and after that he could do nothing but watch and wait. But fortunately his forebodings were not realized this time. In ten minutes Grace galloped back to him with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, and rallied him saucily for his want of enterprise.

"And," said she, "you never told me how splendidly Emperor could jump. I put him at that broad ditch at the end of the common, and he took it like a deer! You must take me to the meet on Friday, Captain Mordaunt; you must, indeed. I am dying to hunt, and Emperor would carry me so well."

"But I thought Lady Wimborne objected to it."

"Oh, she wouldn't mind, I am sure, if I were with you, and you would answer for Emperor's behavior."

"Which I should not dare to do, for he is an excitable animal, and never having been hunted, would be very likely to get uncontrollable. And, after all, it cannot be worth while to throw away one's life for a day's amusement."

"What if one's life is no pleasure to one?"

"Oh, Miss Wimborne, the most forlorn, meager sort of life is always better than none at all."

The county ball that night was a very brilliant affair, and Grace was indisputably the belle of the evening. Handsome, and an heiress, she had, of course, plenty of admirers, but it so happened that she had set her heart upon one man, and all the homage she received elsewhere was worthless in her eyes. It was only when dancing with Jack that she looked smiling and pleased, and the moment he left her to make himself agreeable to any other woman, she seemed listless and depressed. Anastasia whispered to her once that she was attracting attention, and then she took refuge in the other extreme, and was feverishly gay, almost reckless. At last she found her mother and begged to go home. As this proposition quite coincided

with her ladyship's wishes, Jack was hastily summoned, and informed of their wish.

"I am getting so sick of balls; they are all alike," said Grace, languidly. "The drive home is quite the pleasantest part."

"Well, yes, when one can smoke," said the unfeeling Guardsman. "But then, of course, you never can."

"I think a cigarette is rather nice," observed Grace, sympathetically.

"Nonsense, Grace!" put in her mother, with dignity. "What will Captain Mordaunt think of you if you talk in that way?"

"I shall think she is half asleep, and doesn't know what she says," he answered, laughing, as he went off to obey her behest.

Grace was radiant again when she found he was forced to give up his cigar on Mr. Rogers's account and ride inside with them. And how terribly loquacious she was on the way home! He was tired and harassed, and would have liked to be quiet; but Grace had been accustomed to shallow society men, who always expected to be amused, and so she labored to entertain him when she was ready to cry with weariness herself.

Anastasia, who was off duty, had a refreshing nap, while Lady Wimborne compromised matters for propriety's sake, and simply nodded.

Mrs. Mordaunt, who had not gone to the ball, had ordered some hot soup to be kept ready for them on their return, and after having partaken of this, they all retired to their respective rooms. But Grace had no sooner divested herself of her finery (she had considerably allowed her maid to go to bed), than she stole into Anastasia's room, and sat down by the fire with a very dejected air.

"I am quite in despair," she said, "and that is the fact. He won't come to the point. Don't you call it very odd?"

"It is disagreeable, anyhow," replied Anastasia, dryly.

"Disagreeable is no word for it. I am getting quite thin and peaky. I shall lose all my looks if this kind of thing goes on."

"Then make him speak."

"I can't. I have tried every thing I know, and he is just as far off as ever."

"Then, my dear Grace, you had better give up the thing. There are heaps of men who would be only too glad to be in his place."

"I dare say; but one never knows which it is they really want, us or our fortune; whereas, one is quite sure Captain Mordaunt would never marry for money."

"Oh, no! Of course he would rather have some than not, but that is quite natural. I should never marry a man because he had money; but I shouldn't marry him if he hadn't, unless I were awfully in love, you know, and then, I suppose, I should be capable of any thing."

"You never would be awfully in love, my dear; it is not in your nature."

"I don't know about that; but, at any rate, I'd take good care I soon got out of it, if it were all on my side."

"It is very easy to talk, my dear."

"And very easy to act, too, if you have the proper spirit. I would have Captain Mordaunt at my feet in no time."

"How?"

"By snubbing him. A man of that sort, who has it all his own way in the world, is sure to want the woman he fancies he can't get. And, my dear, you have made it so awfully evident that he has only to ask to have."

Grace colored with vexation and wounded pride.

"I don't see why I should be uncivil to him when he is always nice and polite to me, and we are so much thrown together."

"I am never uncivil to him, and yet I don't believe he would ever fancy I wanted to marry him. However, I was only giving you a sisterly hint, and as you don't seem to relish my advice, supposing you let me go to bed?"

"Oh, by all means! I am sorry to have kept you up," returned Grace, with extreme politeness, and walked off in a huff, Anastasia locking the door behind her noisily to show that she did not intend her to return.

Grace was not very strong-minded, and when she found herself in the long, dark passage, with her candle flickering uneasily in the draught, and throwing strange shadows on the wall, her pulses began to quicken, and she wished with all her heart she had not had that little tiff with Anastasia.

However, there was no help for it now, and the only thing, therefore, was to hasten to her own room. But before Grace could carry this resolution into effect, her candle gave what

seemed like an expiring gasp, and a shadowy figure, with hollow, intent eyes, and pallid features, went swiftly but silently past her, and disappeared under a black archway that led to the unoccupied wing.

Grace was too frightened to call out, and luckily it was not her habit to faint, so she just stood still for a minute gasping; and then made a wild dart for her own door, locked herself in, and sunk breathless into the first seat she could find.

In a few minutes she recovered herself sufficiently to be able to search in all the cupboards and under the bed—a proceeding that comforted her exceedingly; and then, having barricaded the door and lighted all the candles, she hurried into bed, and, in spite of her unpleasant adventure, was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

GRACE WINS THE GAME.

GRACE had made a stern resolution over night to speak to Mrs. Mordaunt of her adventure the first thing the next morning; but in broad daylight one can always misjudge and ridicule the fears that were such a keen suffering in the darkness, and Grace felt so wonderfully brave now, she was ready to persuade herself she had been the victim of a delusion.

"The fact was I was over-excited and fatigued, and prepared to imagine anything," she said to herself.

There was to be a dinner party at home that evening, and Grace was much gratified when Mrs. Mordaunt asked her to arrange the flowers for the table.

Coming in and finding her thus engaged, Jack was profuse in his apologies, and declared it was a great deal too bad of his mother, although he commended her taste in the same breath, and smiled at her admiringly as she stood blushing among the flowers and ferns.

To do Jack justice, he did not intend to flirt with Grace Wimborne. The very fact that his mother and Lady Wimborne wanted this marriage was one reason for not talking nonsense to Grace, lest he should be led away by her provocations, and say more than he meant.

Of course it was a difficult position for him, under the circumstances, for the match was so eligible in every way, and seemed so much a matter of course in the neighborhood, he was always being congratulated and having to deny the soft impeachment.

Then Grace was good-hearted and easy-going, and behaved well to his mother, who really liked her, and not being a woman of great penetration, failed to see any want of depth or earnestness in the other.

But Captain Mordaunt had an ideal of his own, and he had determined to live and die an old bachelor rather than take a wife who fell so far short of it as Grace Wimborne.

Grace was very much in earnest herself, as we know; but remembering Anastasia's words the night before, she put on a little air of indifference, and said, "I know what would happen to my poor flower if I gave you one. I should find it in the ball presently, with all the freshness stamped out of it, so I would rather keep it for somebody who is coming to-night, for he would be sure to value it more."

"You mean De Lacy, I suppose?" said Captain Mordaunt, grimly; for men are so constituted that they don't always care for others to have what they don't want themselves.

"I never mention names."

"What is the use, when every one can see that the fellow is spoony on you?"

"And supposing he were, it wouldn't matter to you, Captain Mordaunt."

"I should be sorry to see you throw yourself away on such a fool."

"There!" exclaimed Grace, triumphantly; "you were saying the other day that men were never scandalous."

"I don't call that scandal. I was speaking the exact and simple truth."

"I won't be hard on you this time; but I really can't allow you to speak against Mr. De Lacy again, for I am uncommonly fond of him."

"How happy he would be if he only knew that!"

"Perhaps he guesses," said Grace, hazarding a sidelong glance at Jack.

"He ought to be kicked if he does—a miserable little whipper-snapper like that!"

"You are very severe upon the poor man, and I am sure I can't see why, for he doesn't interfere with you."

"I hate a presumptuous fellow."

"I can't see that he is more presumptuous than other people."

"Do you mean that for a cut at me, Miss Wimborne?"

"Not at all. I was speaking generally, of course. You must remember that Mr. De Lacy has ten thousand a year."

"Made by soap-boiling?"

"He didn't boil soap."

"If his father did, it comes to pretty much the same thing."

"I never said he was a gentleman; but nowadays a man may marry a duke's daughter if he only have money, let his birth be what it may."

"I see you have a great hankering after the soap-boiling connection, Miss Wimborne; and, as he is more than willing, it only remains for me to wish you joy."

"Thank you!" said Grace, saucily. "I will let you know when the day is fixed."

Then she stood looking down, toying with a little bouquet she had just been making up; while the flush deepened on her face, and her pretty mouth quivered ever so slightly.

Now, Jack was not in love with her, as we know; but he had a great weakness for pretty women, and Grace looked charming this afternoon in her simple serge dress, with collar and cuffs of snowy linen, and a sprig of scarlet geranium in her bosom.

"Is that bouquet for me?" he said, after a long pause.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you wouldn't value it."

"How do you know I shouldn't value it?"

And the foolish moth drew a little closer to the flame.

Grace was really embarrassed, and overcome for the first time in her life, and her bashfulness became her.

"I can't tell you how I know," she said; "but women have a sort of instinct in these things which never deceives them. Now, if it was Mr. De Lacy—"

"Confound Mr. De Lacy!" put in Captain Mordaunt, interjectionally.

"I did not know you could be so cruel, Captain Mordaunt. I begin to feel quite afraid of you."

"I have never been cruel to you, have I?"

"Oh, no!" she said, in a fluttering breath; "but then—"

"Well, go on."

"I have never been unkind to you."

"You were very unkind to me just now when you praised De Lacy."

"How does that hurt you?"

"It makes me furiously jealous—that is all."

"I don't care a straw about De Lacy," said Grace, shyly.

"Now that I know you don't care for him, I am willing to admit that he is a good-natured sort of fellow; only I won't have him taking you down to dinner to-night."

"I will go down with whoever you like," answered Grace, meekly; "only please don't let him be very old, because, if so, he will only think of his dinner."

"And you want him to think of you?"

"Well, I should like him to talk. Dinner is such a long ceremony, one needs to have an agreeable neighbor."

"I'll see about that. Now, will you give me my bouquet?"

Grace handed him the little one she had prepared; but he put it aside determinedly.

"No; I want that sprig of geranium flower you are wearing in your dress."

"But that is mine."

"Exactly! That is why I should like it," said Captain Mordaunt, with the quiet audacity that most women thought so irresistible.

"I don't call that fair. I picked it out on purpose to wear to-night."

"Won't it answer the same purpose if I wear it to-night?" he asked, with a saucy smile.

"Besides, there will be no one to fascinate but De Lacy, and you promised me you wouldn't flirt with him."

"I didn't promise anything of the kind," retorted Grace, remembering suddenly the part Anastasia had advised her to play. "I said I wouldn't go down to dinner with him if you didn't wish it, because I knew I should not have any choice in the matter."

Jack looked a little piqued, but fascinated too.

"There! what do you say to my flowers?"

And she held up the little crystal basket she had just been arranging.

"They are almost as charming as you are."

"Upon my word, you deserve this sprig of geranium for such a pretty compliment. Not that you really care to have it, though, of course."

And she gave him another of those bewildering, sidelong glances of hers.

If men were always wise, it would be a good thing, of course, but then the world would be rather tame and dull. Captain Mordaunt lost his head for a few minutes as completely as if he had been a mere lad in the clutches of a clever coquette.

Instead of contenting himself with the sprig of geranium now, he took the little hand too; and finding that Grace did not resist, he drew her close up to him, and kissed her lips.

Grace's head drooped, and she blushed like a rose; but there was an expression of suppressed triumph in her eyes, for she knew that she had a man of honor to deal with.

Jack felt that he was undone—undone by his own folly and a cunning woman's wiles.

Grace stood looking down, toying with a fern leaf, bashful, but by no means anxious to flee from the declaration that must needs follow the kiss.

And the end of it was, poor Jack knew what was expected of him, and saw no help for it. How he cursed fate, and his own folly, and the sprig of geranium, and every thing, as he stood by Grace's side, still holding her hand, because he did not know what else to do, but profoundly and painfully conscious that if she had attracted his fancy for a moment, she had no more touched his heart than if she had been a Chinese image or a Dutch doll!

Here were all the happy dreams of his future annihilated by one foolish kiss, but the keenest pang to him was the recollection of Clara Tremlowe's sweet, pale beauty, and the touching grace of her smile.

She might never have been any nearer to him than she was now—he was not even sure that he wished it, after all he had seen. At the same time he could not bear to build up a barrier between himself and this possible delicious, bewildering happiness.

But Grace was waiting all this while—waiting modestly. Still he knew she was not to be trifled with, for all that; and since he should have to ask her sooner or later, he might as well get it over.

But he could not feign what he did not feel, and it was better not to make any pretense of passion, he thought, or Grace would expect too much of him later. So he said, in a very sober, matter-of-fact way, "Will you marry me, Grace? I don't suppose Lady Wimborne will particularly object, if you are willing."

His voice was cold enough, and when Grace looked into his eyes for some ray of warmth there, he turned away resolutely.

Grace hesitated a minute, not because she was doubtful about her answer, but because she wanted to make him a little more eager. However, finding that sort of thing had no effect, she answered, with secret pique and outside sweetness: "It must be quite as mamma wishes, Captain Mordaunt. Whatever my own feelings might be in a matter of this sort, I should always leave her to decide."

And then Grace's eyes filled in spite of herself, for she was sorely disappointed.

For one brief, happy minute she had believed that Jack loved her, and his kiss still thrilled warm on her lips. But she was no fool, and understood now that he had been led away by the impulse of the moment, and that his honor, not his heart, had prompted him to the offer he had just made.

And, unfortunately, she loved him as much as she could love any one but herself.

Seeing how matters were, a generous woman would have forgiven him the kiss, and left him free. But Grace was not a generous woman, and, moreover, she fancied that she should soon win Jack after they were engaged.

She liked him personally, also his position and fortune. She wanted to triumph over Anastasia; and she thought it was quite time she was married.

Jack felt that he must say something; and so he observed, in a rather husky voice, that he didn't see why they shouldn't get on pretty well together.

Grace laughed to hide her mortification.

"I always do get on with people," she said.

"Yes; but a husband isn't like 'people,' and there is a good deal for both to bear in a relationship of that kind."

"I dare say; but one does see a few happy couples; and," added Grace, really softened by the love she bore him, "if one tries to do one's duty, it must come right in the end."

This little speech touched him, for Grace was evidently sincere, and he had hitherto looked upon her as a mere butterfly, who just floated through life without seeing its more serious side.

He answered gently, but sadly, "Yes, I suppose that's the right way to look at the thing; but most of us would like to make duty and happiness compatible if we could. After all, duty by itself is rather cold comfort."

Grace sighed, and was searching for her answer, when Anastasia came in, and Captain Mordaunt immediately made his escape.

"What a confounded fool I have been!" was the refrain of all his thoughts that afternoon; and somehow the iteration became still more obtrusive and painful when, on going to his room in the twilight, he had just a peep of Miss Tremlowe sitting over the fire alone in a weary, pensive attitude.

"He was almost tempted to go in and cheer her up by a few kind words, only he remembered his miserable engagement, and felt that Grace would consider herself aggrieved by any attention of this sort to Mary's governess."

He made the dinner-party an excuse to himself for not speaking to Lady Wimborne that night.

He had just got into his dress-clothes, and had sent his servant off to help down-stairs, when he heard, with dismay inexpressible, his mother's voice at the door, asking if she might come in.

Of course he couldn't say "No," and braced himself for what was coming.

"Oh, my dear Jack!" said Mrs. Mordaunt, throwing her arms around his neck, and kissing him first on one cheek and then on the other; "Lady Wimborne has just told me a little secret, and I am so glad—although it wasn't quite kind of you, you naughty boy, to let me hear such news as that from any one but yourself. However, I am so happy I am obliged to forgive you! When is the wedding to be?"

"Oh, there's no hurry about that!" answered Jack, coolly. "We must see how we pull together first."

"No one can help getting on with Grace, she is so amiable! Lady Wimborne was saying just now that having been such a dutiful daughter, she was sure to make a good wife."

"That is the sort of thing all mothers consider it necessary to say at such times, don't they?" inquired Jack, dryly. "And I dare say the knowledge that the poor thing is at last disposed of makes them forget her faults!"

"Don't be so cynical, Jack! A man who is just on the brink of matrimony ought to think all women angels."

"I am not just on the brink of matrimony, mother, thank goodness!—and even if I were, I don't suppose my happiness would make me quite blind."

Mrs. Mordaunt looked at him with an anxious, puzzled expression. She had expected to find him in high spirits, and had never seen him look so glum. And yet if he didn't love Grace Wimborne, why had he asked her to be his wife?

"At any rate, my dear," she said, affectionately, "Grace is a very nice girl, and I am glad to have her for a daughter. Indeed, it has been my great wish for three or four years past; although, of course, I wouldn't have said so for the world, in case I might have influenced you to such a step against your own wishes."

"I am sure you never did; and you are so deep there is no sounding you. However, I am quite relieved to find that you don't object."

And, offering his arm to her with ironical gravity, he was about to escort her down-stairs, but she stopped short at the school-room door.

"Don't wait for me, Jack; I am just going in to see if I can't persuade poor Miss Tremlowe to come down a little while this evening. It must be so very dull for her up there always alone, and now—"

"Now I am engaged, it is not a dangerous civility," put in Jack, in rather a bitter tone. "But how would it be if I came to like her better than Grace?"

"Oh, hush, Jack! and don't talk in such a dreadful way," she exclaimed, in a shocked tone.

Captain Mordaunt muttered something between his teeth as he turned on his heel and walked down-stairs. Mrs. Mordaunt felt almost afraid it was a naughty word, but as she hadn't quite heard it, she thought it unnecessary to make any remark.

"Well, what does Miss Tremlowe say?" inquired Jack, with suppressed eagerness, when his mother joined him in the drawing-room five minutes later.

"She says she has a bad headache, and would rather stay quietly in her room; and, after all, I dare say it is just as well as it is, for do you know, Jack, it struck me this evening for the

first time what a remarkably handsome girl she is!"

Jack smiled sternly.

"You never made that discovery until to-night, mother?"

"I never observed her very particularly, I suppose," she answered, with an embarrassed air. "But, really, poor dear! placed as she is, beauty is a great misfortune. Mrs. Tremlowe must be very glad she is in such safe quarters."

"Humph!" said Jack, and hastened to change the subject.

The day had been such an exciting one to Grace that her adventure of the night before quite slipped out of her memory until, the dinner party over, and the last guest departed, she went up to her room, and began to take off her bracelets and rings.

Grace and Anastasia always shared one maid between them when they were on a visit, as Lady Wimborne thought it was such a tax on their friends to take three with them. Grace, therefore, often preferred to undress herself rather than wait until Bertha was disengaged.

To-night she made up her mind to go to bed while every one was about, and try and get to sleep before the ghostly time came. So she lay down, delightfully brave, and in less than twenty minutes was fast asleep.

She did not know how long this had lasted, when the feeling as of a cold hand on her face awoke her suddenly; and springing up in bed, she looked straight into the pallid face and hollow eyes of the terrible apparition she had encountered in the passage the night before.

CHAPTER V.

JACK MAKES HIS PROPOSAL IN DUE FORM.

GRACE was so completely stunned with fright that she fell back on her pillow like one dead, and could not have lifted even her hand to save her life. But after awhile she recovered herself sufficiently to open her eyes, and look about her.

That is to say, she would have looked about her, only that the lamp had gone out, and the room was in utter darkness.

Now, as the lamp was wont to burn ten hours, and she had taken care to have it replenished the last thing, its sudden extinction could not have been accidental, and must have had a far more alarming cause.

"I wonder if I have ever been very wicked?" sighed Grace. "This must be sent me as a punishment for something bad I have done; and, of course, if I don't know what it is, I can't repent or atone. It can't be wrong to care for Jack; and if I used to flirt once upon a time, I never drove any man mad, or made him commit suicide, as one hears of girls doing sometimes. Perhaps Jack may have deserted some girl for me, only she wouldn't have had time since this afternoon to hear of it, and die of a broken heart. It is more likely there is a family ghost, and they have put me in the haunted chamber."

This view of the matter was not reassuring, and it seemed terribly feasible to Grace huddled up under the clothes, listening to the beating of her own heart, and wondering fearfully what would happen next.

But as nothing did happen next, she became gradually a little braver, and ventured to uncover her face. There were a few sparks remaining in the grate, and a piece of stick ignited under their persuasion, and sent up a faint flame, which showed Grace that the room was empty, and just as she had left it overnight.

Profiting by the little flash of courage which this discovery gave her, she jumped out of bed, relighted the lamp and her toilette candles, looked in every corner of the room, and then returned to bed to wait anxiously for the morning.

No sooner did she hear the servants about than she slipped on her dressing-gown and went to her mother's room, where she told her story.

"Mamma, I saw the face as plainly as I see you now; and for the second time," said Grace, emphatically. "I could not have been mistaken twice, you know."

"Perhaps not; but I really don't understand it. I have never allowed myself to believe in supernatural appearances. And why, indeed, if such things were possible, should you be picked out as the victim?"

"I don't know, mamma; but as it is clear that I am, the sooner we get away from Burlington the better."

"What! and leave Jack? Nonsense, my dear; that wouldn't do at all. Between our two selves, the young man is not very desperately in love; and the flame, what there is of it, requires

feeding skillfully if it is not to go out altogether. You would be in an awkward situation if he were to write to you one of these days, and say he had mistaken his feelings, and therefore it would be better for you, as well as for himself, that your engagement should cease."

"He would never dare to do that, mamma."

"I should stay if I were you, at any rate until your engagement is known in the neighborhood, and you have a stronger hold upon him than you have now. It's a pity, for some things, that you have set your heart on Jack Mordaunt, Grace; but as you have, we must try and keep him up to the mark. To-night you can share my room if you like, as Anastasia objects to a bedfellow; and perhaps Mrs. Mordaunt will be able to suggest a better arrangement for to-morrow. Only that, of course, you are prepared for a good deal of ridicule, my dear. Nobody does believe in ghosts nowadays."

"I quite agree with all you say, mamma, and, of course, it is much more feasible that I saw one of the maids than a ghost; at the same time I am quite positive I did not see one of the maids. I am naturally fanciful, mamma, as you know, and have always been the first to laugh about ghosts, and all that sort of thing; but after what I have seen the last two days, I could believe anything."

And Grace looked very much in earnest, and, moreover, so agitated and overcome, that Lady Wimborne rang up her maid, and told her to get the girl a cup of strong tea as quickly as possible.

This certainly comforted Grace; but it staggered Lady Wimborne to find that even in the broad daylight, with others about her, Grace held stanchly to her story, and was quite as certain of her own impressions as she had been when in the darkness the night before.

"But being a practical, matter-of-fact sort of woman, the first thing Mrs. Mordaunt asked, when all this was repeated to her, was if Grace had locked her door when she went to bed."

"Because," she added, "although I should only have respectable servants in my house, one of them might walk in her sleep."

"Could I manage to see the servants?" inquired Grace. "I should know the face again directly I saw it."

"I will explain everything to the housekeeper, my dear, and I am sure she will manage it somehow when they are at dinner to-day. There is a slide in the kitchen, leading into the servants' hall, and it would, of course, be used at meal-times, for the trays, etc. If you placed yourself there, you could examine the women without being seen yourself, or exciting any suspicion. But, tell me, do you remember if your door was locked when you went out to Lady Wimborne this morning?"

"I was so excited and confused I turned the key round half a dozen times at least, so that I might have locked and unlocked it two or three times without knowing."

"That is unfortunate, because we can't get at a solution of the mystery without some information of that kind. Do you always lock your door at night?"

"Generally; but I am apt to forget it at times."

"And last night you had a good deal to think of," observed Mrs. Mordaunt, archly. "We may put it down as probable that you forgot it last night, may we not?"

"As possible, rather. I can hardly imagine it to have been probable when you consider that I had had a serious fright the night before, and was still very tremulous. But, unfortunately, I can't be certain, as I was in such a hurry to get to bed while I heard people about."

"I am afraid we shan't easily get to the bottom of the mystery," observed Mrs. Mordaunt, smiling in a way which showed she did not attach very much importance to Grace's story; "but, at any rate, I will see that you have another room prepared for you to-night."

"Mamma was proposing that I should have a bed in her dressing-room, if you don't mind, Mrs. Mordaunt."

"On the contrary, my dear, I think it would be an excellent arrangement, because you can keep the door open between, and call out if you feel at all afraid."

"Thank you; that will do very well," Grace replied.

Jack had thought of running up to town that day on pretense of business, and so putting off the evil hour of his interview with Lady Wimborne. But he reflected afterward that, as he could not put it off altogether, the next best thing was to get it over; and so watching his opportunity, he caught her ladyship on the

stairs, and carrying her off into the library, formally asked her younger daughter's hand.

Lady Wimborne did not think it necessary to look surprised, but responded most graciously.

"I do assure you, dear Captain Mordaunt, there is no one in the world to whom I would so gladly give my beloved child as to you, for I know you will be good to her. We won't spoil all the romance of the situation by talking about business to-day, will we? I am sure you will consider dear Grace's interests in every way that is proper; and that is all I ask. She is a very amiable, sweet girl, Captain Mordaunt, though I say it, who shouldn't, perhaps; and a good daughter always makes a good wife."

Jack smiled internally.

"And," continued her ladyship, wiping her eyes, "sadly as I shall miss her, I am ready to give her up to you at any time that you demand this sacrifice on my part. A mother must not consider her own feelings at such a time; and to see my dear ones happy will make me happy too. I suppose you and dear Grace have not settled yet when the wedding is to be?"

"We have not spoken about the wedding-day yet," replied Jack, with an embarrassed yet resolute air. "We are only just engaged, you see."

"I know; but long engagements are a great mistake. I am sure you will agree with me there. They wear people's affections out, and their courage too; and you see, my dear Captain Mordaunt, when there is nothing to wait for, delay causes a good many unpleasant remarks."

"I'll take care that none are made where I am, my lady," he answered, grimly.

"They are not likely to be made where you are, but they will be made, for all that, and my dear child must be the sufferer. However," she added, with affected gayety, "I will leave you to settle all this between yourselves; and I have no doubt you will come to a pleasant understanding."

So saying, her ladyship rose with a formidable rustle, offered Jack her hand, and then sailed out, looking from behind, as he irreverently said to himself, all false hair and flounces.

She was just the sort of mother-in-law Jack thought peculiarly objectionable, but he was in for it now, and could not help himself. But if he found no other way after he was married of resisting her aggressions, he must let the place, and go abroad. Anything would be better, he decided, than having "dear Grace's" mother always at his elbow to keep him up to his duty.

But there was no need to anticipate evils. He was not married yet, and if only some better match came in Grace's way, he fancied she would soon give him the go-by. This was a consummation devoutly to be hoped, and one which would even find a place in his prayers. For he knew that no worse destruction could come upon a man than to be mated with one whom he neither respected nor loved.

Of course it was his own fault, but then very few of us are so severely punished for a foolish impulse as Jack had been; and it seemed hard that all the happiness of his life was to go to expiate one error, which could scarcely be called a sin.

The next few days passed without incident of any kind. Jack was but a cold lover and Grace often felt very mortified and hurt; but he treated her with all proper consideration before others, and was always ready to ride, drive, or walk at her bidding, so that she was forced to be satisfied, and look forward to better days.

He also gave her handsome presents, to make up for other deficiencies, and Grace made the most of these to her friends. But, to do her justice, she would have given them all thankfully for one look of real love, or a kiss that came from the heart.

Meanwhile, she had seen nothing more of the apparition, and was beginning to feel quite brave again, although her peep into the servants' hall had satisfied her that her nocturnal visitor had not been one of Mrs. Mordaunt's maids. A line of ruddier, more unghostly faces it would have been impossible to see, and she dismissed that theory with contumely.

"But certainly," she said to herself, "I will have the mystery solved before I come here to live, otherwise I will make Jack let the place, and take another which hasn't so many dark passages in it. I don't see why I should be frightened out of my wits just for the sake of living at one's own place, when we should have a good position anywhere; and, what is more, I won't be," concluded Grace, who seemed to ignore the possibility of Captain Mordaunt's will turning out, in the long run, to be stronger than her own.

But then Grace was as obstinate as a mule, and had found hitherto that a dogged persistence generally wore other people out; and so was sure of her own way in the end. She never doubted that she should be able to manage Jack as she managed her mother and Anastasia, and made up her mind to open the campaign on the first opportunity.

Something that she heard two days after her engagement prejudiced her more than ever against Burlingham, which she came to regard as an impossible home for her, either in the present or the future.

Jack had an old nurse who had been pensioned off when he and his sister grew up, and lived now very happily in a little cottage in the village.

When she heard of Jack's engagement, she went up to the house directly to ask if the news were true, and to beg to be allowed to wish the young lady happiness if it were.

Unfortunately, Grace and Jack were out riding; and, as Molly's "rheumatics" made locomotion difficult, Mrs. Mordaunt promised for Grace that she should go and see her, instead of giving Molly another journey.

Grace did not seem exactly to relish the idea, for she always said that she hated common people, and did not consider that even long and faithful service constituted any claim, as, of course, they had always been paid for all they had done.

Jack saw that she was not very willing, and, putting it down as shyness, offered to accompany her; but, just as they were starting, his steward came on business, and Grace had, after all, to go alone.

Anastasia, who was strolling up and down the terrace in the sunshine with Mr. Rogers, laughed at her as she passed, and said that she would not make a very favorable impression on Molly if she did not put on a more amiable face; and this, of course, rather increased Grace's ill-humor.

"It is so ridiculous having old servants," she said to herself, crossly, as she marched through the lanes. "I will take care I don't have any thing of the sort when I keep house."

However, the fresh air and the sunshine influenced Grace pleasantly in spite of herself; and, by the time she reached Molly's cottage, she was inclined to be civil, if not exactly cordial.

She found the old woman sitting in state by the fireside, in the very brown silk dress she had worn at Jack's christening, and photographs of the family hung upon the mantie-piece in conspicuous positions.

She got up, in spite of her rheumatism, to make Grace a curtsy, for the match was one Molly thought very suitable in every way, and a credit to the family.

Grace supposed she ought to shake hands, and did it. Then she sat down by the fire, knowing quite well that she was going to be entertained for the next hour with an account of every thing Jack had ever done or said as a boy *ad nauseam*. For Grace was not capable of the kind of tenderness which would have made all these little reminiscences so attractive to some women, and felt horribly bored even in anticipation.

However, Molly was no fool, and told her stories so graphically, that Grace was quite amused in spite of herself, and began to show some interest in the conversation; especially when it branched off from Jack's infantile disorders and boyish peccadilloes to the family history generally.

"I do say Mr. Jack is just a wonder, considering what bad blood there has been in some of the Mordaunts, miss," said old Molly, who thought, as Grace was about to belong to the family, she need not be particularly discreet. "Now there's his great uncle, James—whose portrait stands on your right as you go into the picture-gallery—he was a wicked gentleman if you like!"

"How was he wicked?"

"Well, miss, he loved all ladies better than his own wife," answered Molly, "and used to leave her all alone at home while he went to Court, and amused himself. Her ladyship, who was a daughter of the Earl of Sydhams, had a great fortune; but he spent it all, and then, as she was not likely to come into anything more, and was rather in his way, he cut her throat and threw her body down a deep pit that there used to be over yonder by the chalk-kiln, even so late as in my time."

"And how was it found out?" inquired Grace.

"Well, miss, her ladyship had a favorite dog—she had no children, poor dear!—and when the dog missed its mistress, it went howling

about all over the place, searching for her, until it was enough to make your blood run cold. At last he took to standing at the edge of the pit, and howling there; and as he would not come away, people began to think there must be something in it."

"I wonder they didn't think so at first, considering that their mistress was missing," put in Grace.

"To be sure, miss, they might as well, but, somehow, they didn't; and when they did begin to suspect, the difficulty was to get any one to go down, you see, as it was a great risk, and the colonel did not offer any reward."

"I wonder that didn't make them doubly suspicious."

"Perhaps it did; but in those days farmers and servants were a good deal more under a gentleman's thumb than they are now, and nobody liked to accuse the master, and get a horsewhipping for his pains."

"Well, what happened at last?"

"The parson took it up, out of revenge, it is supposed, for the colonel had behaved very ill to his daughter. He got hold of a man who had also a grudge against the master, and they tied a couple of long ladders securely together, and went down the pit, where they found her ladyship lying, all bruised, and broken, and dead, poor heart! with a great gash in her throat."

Grace shuddered first, and then laughed.

"What a horrible story!" she said. "I hope the colonel was hanged."

"No, miss. He saved them the trouble, for when he saw he was found out, he mounted his favorite charger, blindfolded it with his pocket handkerchief, and, turning its head toward the pit, spurred it forward, and disappeared into the gaping hole beyond."

"I am glad of that," the girl said. "I hope he was killed by the fall!"

"Of course he was killed, miss, for the pit was nearly a hundred feet deep; but the odd part of it was,"—lowering her voice mysteriously—"his body was never found."

"Oh! how was that?"

"Nobody ever knew, miss. They went down directly and looked for him; but, though the horse lay there still warm, and almost palpitating, there was no sign of the master."

"Perhaps he was underneath, and had been buried in the mud by the force of the fall."

"That is just what Miss Tremlowe said when I told her the story," said old Molly. "But I should think they searched thoroughly while they was about it, shouldn't you?"

"One would think so. But how came you to tell Miss Tremlowe this story?"

"I don't know, miss, I am sure. She is often kind enough to come in here, and sit with me a bit, and I am apt to dwell a good deal on these old stories with people who will listen to me."

"I shouldn't have thought they would have interested her," observed Grace, rather haughtily.

"I don't know about that, miss. Her great grandfather was the youngest brother of the very James Mordaunt I have been telling you about; but, you see, he married below him, and fell into poverty, and his daughter ran away from her husband, so that the two branches of the family got divided, you see."

"Do Mrs. Mordaunt and her son know about the relationship?"

"It can scarcely be called a relationship now, miss, being so far back; but Madam told me herself that Miss Tremlowe was a sort of fourth cousin, and asked me if I didn't think she was a little like some of the old family pictures. But perhaps you have noticed that yourself, miss?"

"I have never seen Miss Tremlowe."

"Really, now; and been in the same house with her over a fortnight? That is odd!" said old Molly, innocently. "Perhaps she's ill!"

"I fancy she has been rather poorly—I heard somebody say so," answered the girl, carelessly; "but, in any case, she could not attend to her duties properly if she were always in the drawing-room."

"No; but always and never are very different words!" said old Molly, decidedly. "Madam is very kind to every one about her; but perhaps she thinks her company might object to Miss Tremlowe because she is only a governess."

Grace looked half inclined to resent this speech. But, remembering that old Molly was a privileged person, she simply said, "As far as I am concerned, I don't see anything to object to in a governess, if they are ladylike and well-mannered; but, of course, I have nothing to do with Mrs. Mordaunt's arrangements. I dare say she does ask Miss Tremlowe to come into the drawing-room, but the young lady prefers to keep quiet after the fatigue of teaching."

"Perhaps that is it. But it is a pity, too, for I am sure you would like her, miss, and she is quite the gentlewoman."

"I dare say," answered Grace, with supreme indifference; "but, having my sister with me, I don't want any other companion. But you didn't finish your story, Mrs. Loveday."

"No more I did. Well, they couldn't find the colonel's body, miss, but her ladyship's lay in state, and all the neighborhood round came to see her, and spoke of her with affectionate pity and respect. But the strange part of it was that every time the door was opened her pet dog stole in, and lay down in her cold bosom, and it and snarled at those who took him away. And so cunning and determined was he, that when she was laid in her coffin he hid himself in the folds of her dress, and so was buried with her, in spite of them all. And now, when any misfortune is coming to the family, you are sure to see her ladyship, with the dog at her heels, gliding through the passages—although she only just stares at you with her great, hollow eyes, and then rushes away."

Grace turned very pale, although she tried to laugh.

"How very absurd, Mrs. Loveday! No one believes in ghosts nowadays."

"I dare say not, miss; still, what you see yourself you are apt to believe; and I saw her ladyship and the dog, just as plain as I see you this moment, the very day, as Madam heard afterward, that poor Miss Mary had died."

"Oh, pray, don't tell me such dreadful things!" exclaimed Grace, agitatedly. "I shall never be able to live at Burlingham if you do!"

"Well, but Madam has lived there these thirty years, miss, and has never been molested in any way—indeed, she scolds me if I talk about it, and says I am very foolish to believe such things, for that her ladyship isn't very likely to want to come back to a place where she suffered so terribly. But, then, she mayn't have any choice in the matter, may she?"

"I have told you I don't believe in anything of the kind," returned Grace, the more decidedly that she had a terrible fear on her. "And now I must go, for it is getting late. Good afternoon, Mrs. Loveday. I'll come and see you again before I go away," she concluded, by way of getting off pleasantly, for she had certainly no intention of paying Molly another visit. And then she shook hands with the old woman, and hurried back to the Hall.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT JACK THOUGHT OF THE GHOST.

CAPTAIN MORDAUNT was still busy with his steward when Grace got in, but she had not been ten minutes in the drawing-room before he joined them.

"I am so sorry I was not able to go and meet you," he said, seating himself by Grace; "but when once Langham gets hold of me he is inexorable—he says it is because he does not often have the opportunity. How did you like old Molly?"

"Not at all," she answered decidedly. "She told me such horrible stories, I shall be afraid to go to bed."

"Really?"

"Really and truly. I did not know there was a ghost in the family until this afternoon, and I would have preferred to be ignorant of the fact."

"But you don't believe in those things, do you?"

"What are you to do when a person says to you, 'I know it is true, for I saw it with my own eyes?'"

"Laugh in her face. Molly will tell you that I always treat her traditions in that irreverent fashion."

"But did your great uncle kill his wife, and then throw her body into a pit?"

"Undoubtedly, if the family chronicles are worthy of credence."

"And then commit suicide in the same place?"

"Yes; so far Molly is implicitly to be believed, but all the rest is rubbish."

"But then she is ready to swear she saw the ghost of Lady Edith on the very day your sister died in India."

"I know she is. She has told me that story twenty times, at least; but if she were to multiply the twenty by one hundred, it would not make any difference, as far as I am concerned, because it is quite easy to understand how and why her delusion arose."

"How did it?"

"We had just received a telegram from my brother-in-law telling us of my poor sister's dangerous illness, and, her imagination being ex-

cited and her feelings stirred by these sorrowful tidings, Molly was ready to fancy any thing. Under those circumstances, to walk through a dark passage was sufficient."

"I dare say I am foolish, but somehow I can't help believing her, although I know that your explanation sounds feasible; and I am quite sure that I should die of fright if I had to live at Burlingham."

"Indeed!" answered Jack, coldly, but with a secret thrill of hope. "Unfortunately, I can't transfer my house to a locality that you might choose and like; and then you will pardon me if I say that I like it very well where it is—in spite of the ghost."

Grace pouted demonstratively.

"I can't think why it signifies where people live if they have those they care for with them."

"Well, I am very conservative by nature, you see. I can't bear even to cut a tree down that I can remember as a boy, and in a new place I should miss all the pleasantness of old association. Don't you understand that feeling?"

"No," answered Grace, curtly. "I think it is absurd. Fancy caring for an uncomfortable place just because your great-grandfather was born there!"

"My great-grandfather was not born here, and I can not say I think the place uncomfortable."

"I only meant that it was uncomfortable from having such disagreeable traditions attached to it, of course. You couldn't be happy in a house if you were afraid to move a step in it after dark."

"Certainly not; but I think one could easily get over that difficulty. If there was nothing to be afraid of, one would take care to conquer one's fears; if there was something to be afraid of, one would take care to conquer that."

"And if 'that' were something you could not conquer?"

Captain Mordaunt smiled.

"Don't you believe in impossibilities?" he said. "But I need not ask the question, since you believe in ghosts."

"I did not say I actually believed in them; but some things are very strange."

"A great many things are very strange, and incomprehensible, too; but I don't see why we need be afraid of what we do not understand. The greatest philosopher the world ever knew could not explain even half the mysteries of nature, and this makes one tolerant of one's own ignorance, and satisfied not to pry too deeply. The spirits of the dead may be about and around us always; but I never knew a sensible man yet who was satisfied that they were allowed to become visible to the living."

"Still," observed Grace, lowering her voice to almost a whisper, "you will admit that it was very strange I should have seen twice since I came to Burlingham a figure exactly like that old Molly describes; because, you see, I never heard the story until to-day, and, therefore, imagination can have had nothing to do with it."

"That was an odd coincidence, certainly; but I dare say the whole thing might be explained and accounted for naturally."

"I don't see how."

"It might have been a living person who went into your room from curiosity or accident."

"Any one in this house who was curious about me could gratify her curiosity in a far more legitimate way; and as for accidents of that sort, they are not likely to occur in a well-regulated house like this," answered Grace, decidedly.

Jack shrugged his shoulders, and taking her cup from her, marched off with it to his mother's tea-table, and stayed there. Grace waited for a little while, thinking he would return; but finding that he had taken little Mary on his knee, and seemed very well entertained, she retired to her own room in a huff.

"Uncle Jack," said Mary, with a sagacious nod of her golden head, "I wish you would come up-stairs and talk to Miss Tremlowe a little. She is always crying now, and I expect it is because she feels so lonely, don't you?"

"Then why doesn't she come among us a little more, Mary? We should all be pleased to see her, and the change would do her good. She will mope herself into an illness if she doesn't take care."

"I believe she is ill now," returned Mary, wisely. "She is so thin, uncle Jack, and sometimes she doesn't eat one mouthful all day."

"Oh, but that is very wrong!" exclaimed Jack, looking alarmed. "You must tell grand-mamma that, Mary."

"I can't," said Mary. "I promised Miss Tremlowe I wouldn't, because she said it would frighten her."

"I should think it would, indeed! But something must be done," said Jack, reflectively.

"Won't she eat, or can't she?"

"She can't, uncle Jack. I have seen her try so hard, and almost cry with vexation when she couldn't get a mouthful down. She says she doesn't want to die until she has seen her mother and sister again."

"And why then?"

"I don't know, but I fancy she is very unhappy. She wouldn't cry so if she weren't, would she?"

"It may be only weakness," returned Captain Mordaunt; "but, in any case, it must be looked to. Where is Miss Tremlowe now?"

"She is lying down in her room; but she said I was to call her directly I went up-stairs, and be sure to wake her if she were asleep."

"Run and talk to Mr. Rogers; he is beckoning you," said Captain Mordaunt, suddenly putting little Mary down. And when the child was out of hearing, he bent forward, so as only to be heard by his mother, and said, "Have you noticed anything the matter with Miss Tremlowe, mother?"

Mrs. Mordaunt glanced up at him sharply.

"Nothing, to my knowledge. She is looking a little pale just now, but she tells me that the winter always tries her, and she shall be all right directly we get a little warm weather. The fact is, I dare say that she worries about her sister, and by confining herself to two rooms does not give herself a chance of forgetting her troubles."

"Couldn't you persuade her to mix with us a little more, mother?"

"I have tried repeatedly, but she always begs earnestly to be excused, and takes great pains to persuade me that she is better amused with a book than she would be by our conversation down-stairs."

"Yes; only the question is, what is good for her; and I am really afraid she will fall ill on your hands if you don't take care."

"Well, but what can I do more than I have done?" said Mrs. Mordaunt, rather impatiently.

"I can't insist upon her coming into the drawing-room without seeming arbitrary."

"I don't know, mother. You would make your own daughter do a thing of that kind if you thought it good for her."

"Certainly; but in that case I should have the right—in Miss Tremlowe's I have none."

"Anyhow, I should insist upon her seeing a doctor, mother, for I am sure she is much more ill than you have any idea of."

"Have you seen her, then, lately?" inquired Mrs. Mordaunt, rather suspiciously.

"No. All my information comes from Mary. She seems quite distressed at her governess's state of health. She says she often goes all day without eating anything."

"Why didn't Mary tell me this?"

"Miss Tremlowe made her promise not to do so, lest you should be alarmed."

"It is a great pity; for, of course, Miss Tremlowe is under my charge, and I should not like her to be neglected. But, having so much company lately, I have not been able to look after her as I could wish; and she will not complain, I see, however poorly she may be. Thank you for your hint, Jack. I will take care she has proper attention and advice, and in a few days, when I am alone again, I shall be able to keep her more under my own eye."

"You mean when I am gone," was Jack's mental correction. "Poor mother! She is not quite sure even yet that I might not be dangerous, although my claws have been drawn. And perhaps she is right. Grace's pink-and-white prettiness is in no way to be compared with the pale, sweet loveliness of the other, and there is something about Miss Tremlowe that not only pleases the eye, but satisfies the heart."

Jack's reverie finished with a sigh, and he buried himself in a newspaper, to hide the trouble and yearning in his eyes.

Grace was particularly charming that evening, and chatted incessantly; but Captain Mordaunt was pre-occupied, and occasionally answered at random.

Her sensitive vanity was wounded at last, and she said, in a petulant tone, "You don't listen to a word I say. I have to ask you the same question three times at least before I can get an answer."

"I beg your pardon," he answered, coloring faintly. "I have a miserable headache."

"You seem to be very subject to headaches," she answered, suspiciously.

"Am I? I was not aware of it myself; but I

bow to your superior wisdom. They say people often know us better than we know ourselves. But won't you sing us something, Grace; and listening, I shall forget all my pains."

Grace was mollified, and rustled off to the piano without waiting to be pressed. She sung well; and as Jack was fond of music, he would hang over her at these times begging for one song more, and flattering her immensely by his appreciation.

To-night he was not so demonstrative. Still, he listened attentively, and thanked her when she had finished; and as Grace saw that he really was out of sorts, she forgave him all other omissions for this once.

He was thankful when his duties of host were over, and he had handed the last bedroom candlestick, and shut out the last skirt, although that was Mrs. Mordaunt's.

Rogers had to be entertained for the next half-hour; but he was never very conversational over his pipe, and, moreover, had a good deal to think of that night, as he had proposed to Anastasia in the course of the evening. Having announced this fact laconically, and made a comical allusion to their being companions in misfortune, he subsided into silence, and left Jack to his reflections undisturbed.

But he started up when the clock struck one, and said, laughing, "Upon my word, this sort of thing won't do now, Mordaunt! We must get into the habit of keeping regular hours now that we are almost married men, or we shall be laying up for ourselves an awful reserve of curtain lectures. You've got the handsomest of the pair, but Anastasia is the better tempered, so that I don't envy you, after all. It would be awful fun, wouldn't it, if we were both of us married on the same day?"

Jack thought it would be "awful" to be married to Grace Wimborne on any day; and, still more, entertained faint hopes of escaping his doom, but he did not say so, and Rogers, who took his misfortunes cheerfully, went off laughing to bed.

Jack drew his chair closer to the fire then, and lighted another pipe. It was no use hurrying to bed when he was sure not to sleep, and this quiet hour by his own fireside was always the best of the day.

He had got about half-way through his pipe, and had just come to the philosophical conclusion that all the while a man could smoke life would always have its compensations, when he fancied he heard a step in the hall.

His den was right at the end of the hall, built out into the garden; but it was not often people had occasion to pass it, as the staircase leading to the west wing was virtually unused.

He was naturally surprised, therefore, at hearing any one in this part of the house, and opening the door softly, caught up the lamp, and peered cautiously into the gloom.

At first he could perceive nothing, but presently saw a shadow detach itself from the other shadows, waver for a moment, and then glide on noiselessly up the stairs.

He caught one glimpse of a pale, even profile, and his heart gave a great bound, for he had recognized Clara Tremlowe, and it seemed to him she had come in answer to the deep yearning at his heart.

Only that she looked so strange and ghastly in her dark drapery, and her eyes had such a blank look in them, that he felt a sort of awe creeping over him in spite of himself. Still he followed, but though she must have heard his steps, she did not turn, or show any consciousness of his presence.

On top of the landing she paused, appeared to hesitate for a moment, and then, instead of taking the passage that led toward the center of the house where her own room was situated, went swiftly but unerringly down a long, narrow place, and disappeared through a door at the end.

Jack was up with her in three strides, but, when he opened the door a great gush of wind blew into his face, extinguishing the lamp; and while he stood hesitating what to do, a wild, terrified figure dashed past him, shrieking, and vanished into the shadows beyond.

CHAPTER VII.

TRIED IN THE FIRE.

CAPTAIN MORDAUNT had been driven against the wall by the force and suddenness of the impetus he had received, but he picked himself up presently and groped about for the lamp. However, it appeared to have rolled after its fall, for though he went down on his hands and knees, he could find no trace of it.

This was peculiarly unfortunate, Jack thought, as he had no candle in his room down-stairs,

and did not want to have to go in search of one. At last he bethought himself of an expedient, and lighting some paper in his pocket with a fusee, he held it, blazing, close to the ground, recovered possession of the lamp, and dashed down-stairs.

Here another difficulty occurred, which he had not anticipated—every drop of oil had been spilled out of the lamp; but as the wick was still moist he thought he might possibly manage to keep it alight while he went for some candles, which he fancied he should find on the drawing-room table.

It never occurred to Jack that the candlesticks being silver, Benson would be sure to lock them up in his pantry at night; and at last in sheer despair, Jack marched off to the kitchen.

Here he at last found what he wanted; but all these different journeys and searchings had taken time, and it was rather more than a quarter of an hour before he returned to the stairs, prepared for any discoveries that might come in his way.

But when he reached the bottom of the stairs he saw a sudden glow of brightness in front that surprised him, and then he heard a crackling noise as of dry wood burning in a fierce fire.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Jack, turning pale; "the oil from the lamp must have caught fire. How could I have been such a fool as to fling the paper down without making sure it was out?"

He mounted a few steps to ascertain the full extent of the evil, and finding that the whole corridor was in flames, and the strong draught would drive it to the very heart of the building, he sprang down-stairs, and sounded the gong with a force that would have roused the seven sleepers.

Troubled by old Molly's stories, Grace did not find it very easy to get to sleep that night; although, as a rule, she had neither heart nor conscience enough to disturb her rest. But, then, ghosts were quite a new experience, and in this case novelty had no charm, pleasing as Grace generally thought it.

But after hearing the clock strike one, Grace became drowsy, and soon after sunk into a deep, dreamless sleep.

She was roused suddenly by the gong, and, being a shrewd young person, it not only occurred to her that there must be something very wrong, but also that there was not a minute to be wasted. So she hurried into some clothes, put on a warm flannel peignoir, and went into her mother's room.

Lady Wimborne was sitting up in bed, with a very anxious face.

"My dear," she said, "what can be the matter? No one would sound the gong in the middle of the night unless there was something very seriously wrong. Just open the door, will you, and see if any one is about. I should rather not get out of bed unless I am obliged, on account of my cold. Stop; perhaps I had better first dress a little, and go to Mrs. Mordaunt's room. She may be ill, and Captain Mordaunt may have sounded the gong to rouse us, as he did not like to come to our rooms. Men are so stupid when they are frightened. Just hand me my shawl, Grace. Thank you. Now you may open the door. Good gracious! there is the gong again. He can't surely suppose we didn't hear it the first time, and it is so inconsiderate of people to behave in this way, just as if one had no nerves!"

Grace opened the door, and for one second stood appalled, for she could see the red gleam of the fire at the end of the passage, and heard the crackling of the flames.

"What is the matter? Why don't you speak?" inquired Lady Wimborne, who was watching her face anxiously.

"The house is on fire!" Grace threw back over her shoulder. "There is not a moment to lose!"

"Stop, Grace! I am coming directly! You won't surely desert me, child?" screamed Lady Wimborne, almost beside herself with fright.

But Grace was already gone. Her only thought, her sole instinct at that moment being to save herself.

The house was so built that the east and west wings were connected by a long corridor, into which opened all the best bedrooms, now occupied by Mrs. Mordaunt and her guests.

The west wing was little used. The east wing was entirely given up to the servants.

Lady Wimborne's room was the last of those in the center of the building, as she liked to be as near as possible to her maid, so that unless the eager, hungry flames had traveled there before her, Grace's safety seemed secure.

But as she opened the door, a volley of thick, black smoke poured in upon her, taking away her breath; and through it there came a little tongue of fire, eager and rapid, which made a sly dart at her bosom as if it would stab her.

Grace drew back, panting and irresolute.

Then remembering that there was certain death behind her, and just a chance of life in front, she covered her face, and bounded wildly through the smoke and flame—falling prone on the outer edge of the burning barrier.

Meanwhile, Captain Mordaunt, having roused the whole house, rushed to the stable and woke the coachman and groom.

He knew that if he went back to the house he would only perish with those he longed to save, and that the sole chance for them was to get them all out through the windows.

Luckily there was a long ladder on the premises, as some men had been repairing the roof; and, with the coachman's help, he carried this toward the house, and placed it against his mother's window.

Seeing him, she threw up the sash with a cry of thankfulness, and he hurried to her at once.

"Come quickly, mother!" he said. "There is not a second to lose!"

But she shook her head, and, moving, pointed to Lady Wimborne, who was clinging to the bedpost, and shrieking frantically.

"I will fetch her next time; but you have the first claim," said Jack, determinedly. "You only waste precious time by resisting, mother. Come!"

"But Mary?" she gasped.

"I will see about Mary—only come."

"But my life is nearly lived out, Jack. Save the rest, and leave me."

"Never, mother!—that I swear!" he answered, seizing her arm; and when she saw that he would not be put off, she reluctantly consented, and allowed him to guide her down the steps.

She had scarcely reached the bottom rung, when Lady Wimborne, who was absolutely frantic with terror, climbed over the window-sill, lost her footing, and came down with a crash. Her shrieks and loud lamentations showed she was not dead; and that was all Jack had time to think about just then.

The servants were all collected on the lawn by this time, every one eager to help; there were still four to be saved, and the fire, fed by the old timber, and fanned by the winter wind, was beginning to rage furiously.

Against the red background he could see, as in a frame, the white faces of the four unhappy creatures, and was seized with a sort of horror when he thought of the impossibility of saving all.

"Hadn't you better throw your bedding down, and jump on it?" he shouted to Mr. Rogers. "I have only this one ladder. Or make a rope of your sheets. Do something, for Heaven's sake! There are the women and the child! I must think of them first!"

"Of course you must. Never mind about me," Rogers shouted. "I thought you had means at hand, and, therefore, it was no use risking one's limbs! Take care of Anastasia if—if—"

But the flames burst through the doors at this moment, and made a playful dart at him, like a cat toying with its prey. If he did not wish to be devoured, he must bestir himself, he found, for if he stayed where he was there was about one minute between him and eternity.

"You must think of Mary next," Mrs. Mordaunt had said. And Jack knew that it must be so, without being quite sure whether he should have made that selection if he had been left entirely to his own feeling in the matter.

Anastasia had joined Miss Tremlowe and little Mary, and, inspired by the young governess's calm courage, she had hitherto behaved very well; but when she saw the ladder placed against the window, and realized that the one who went next would probably be the last to go down at all, she pressed wildly forward, determined that that one should be herself.

"Keep back," said Jack, sternly, "and let me get the child!"

But Anastasia was mad with fright now, and would not yield, wasting the seconds that were so infinitely precious.

If she had been a man, Jack would have struck her backward; but she was a woman, and the wild anguish and terror in her eyes wrung his heart.

While he was hesitating, Clara Tremlowe quietly took her round the shoulders, and drew her out of the way; then, kissing little Mary, who was cowering against her bosom, she said softly, without a tremor in her voice, "Good—"

by, darling; don't forget my message," and put her into Captain Mordaunt's outstretched arms.

Little Mary was quite quiet, although he could feel her shudder convulsively. But when he handed her down she roused, and said, in a passionately pleading tone, "Oh, my dear Miss Tremlowe, uncle Jack—she will be burnt to death!"

"Not if I can help it," was the firm reply; and Jack sprung back up the few steps again.

There was only Anastasia's despairing face at the window now, but when he called Miss Tremlowe by name, she seemed to rise up suddenly out of a cloud of smoke, still calm, and even smiling. Pushing Anastasia forward in such a way that to have thrust her back again would have been murder, she sunk down, without even a cry, into her fiery grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BRAVE HEART.

AS Captain Mordaunt dropped Anastasia's insensible figure on the ground, his mother, seeing his resolute face, and knowing what it meant, grasped hold of his arm, and said, beseechingly, "Don't go again; it is no use, Jack—you see it isn't; and—and—"

"She is only a governess!" put in Jack, with a bitterness he could not control. "Nevertheless, she saved your grandchild's life, mother, and if I cannot save hers, I will perish with her!"

So saying, he broke away from her grasp, sprung up the ladder, and disappeared, as it seemed to those below, into a gulf of smoke and fire.

But things were not quite so desperate really as they looked from the lawn; and Jack had this advantage, too, that he knew where to find Clara, instead of having to grope about for her blindly.

Still, the situation was sufficiently critical, and would have been utterly hopeless, only that the flames were making a meal of the old four-poster in the centre of the room, and the heavy moorhen curtains made it tough of mastication.

This checked their fury for the moment, but Jack knew they would make a rush at the window-frames next, and cut off his escape, if he were not quick; and raising Clara in his arms, he made a step forward, and then sunk gasping against the wall.

It is impossible to say how it would have been, only that Rogers, who had let himself down safely by making a rope of his sheets, came to the rescue; and the very sound of his voice gave Jack the power somehow to cast off the stupor that was stealing over him, and make one more effort for dear life.

And once at the window, where he could breathe a little more freely, he felt his strength and courage both revive.

But when Rogers would have taken his burden from him, Captain Mordaunt only pressed the unconscious figure closer to him, and said, "Not while I have the strength to keep her, Rogers!" And staggering down the ladder with his load, he placed it gently on the grass, and fell swooning at his mother's feet.

Captain Mordaunt was a good deal scorched, Anastasia slightly so, but the only person who was really injured was Miss Tremlowe—how much it was impossible to say until the doctor had seen her; and having sent off a man on horseback into the village, Mrs. Mordaunt ordered a carriage to be got ready to convey them all to one of Jack's farm-houses, where they had been offered shelter for the present.

Meanwhile, Jack recovered, and after a stiff dose of cold brandy and water, pulled himself together, and went to see if any one were missing.

Then, for the first time, he noticed that Grace was not among them, and anxiously inquired if any one had seen her. It was impossible to question Lady Wimborne, for she had been in raging hysterics ever since her fall, and almost justified her maid's malediction that she wished she had been hurt, and then she would be quiet, perhaps. But he asked the servants, and finally appealed to his mother, who confessed, with shame, that she had forgotten all about the girl, or supposed it was all right, as Lady Wimborne had not referred to her in any way.

"It was odd they should not have been together," she added, in great distress. "I was so frightened about Mary I could not remember any thing else. I am afraid there is no hope of her having been saved."

"None whatever," answered Jack, solemnly. "But we must think of the living now; and the sooner we are all under shelter the better."

"And you, Jack?" she said, wistfully.

"I shall stay and see the last of the old place, mother," he answered, with a break in his voice that showed him deeply moved. "I never knew how much I cared for it until now that it is gone."

"Nor I," answered his mother, tremulously; my poor Mary was born there. However, we must not repine, Jack, for we have had a very merciful escape from a sudden and awful death. As far as I am concerned, I can only remember that you and the child are safe, my dear."

"Yes; Heaven be praised for our preservation, mother; and we must try to forget every thing else. Here comes the fire-engine at last; too late to be of any use. But you had better get off, mother; I am sadly afraid you will catch cold."

"Not with such a big fire to warm me," she answered, with a sorrowful smile. "However, for Miss Tremlowe's sake, we had better go. You will come to us, soon, and rest, Jack, won't you?"

"I don't think I could rest, mother, I feel so strangely excited; but I will go to you in an hour's time, even if I do not remain, just to see how Miss Tremlowe is."

"Very well," she said; "I shall expect you."

And then they all drove off, Lady Wimborne still sobbing and shrieking; Clara lying like a broken lily, with her pale head on Mrs. Mordaunt's knees; while little Mary, who thought this silence could only mean death, sobbed over her as if her heart would break.

But, by the time they had reached the farmhouse, Clara had recovered consciousness, and Mary was comforted, although it was evident to Mrs. Mordaunt that the poor girl was suffering horribly, and could with difficulty suppress her groans.

She was lifted out very carefully, and carried at once up-stairs to a room that had been hastily prepared. Mrs. Mordaunt undressed her herself as tenderly as her own mother might have done, and having applied some oil to her wounds, and eased her somewhat, hurried down-stairs to get a little brandy.

Opening the door of the little parlor, where she expected to find Mrs. Faith, she saw some one cosily stretched out in front of the fire, sleeping profoundly, and, with a thrill of repugnance that amounted to actual disgust, recognized Grace Wimborne. Mrs. Mordaunt did not care to speak to her just then, lest she should be tempted to say more than she ought, and so she stole out and left her to her slumbers; but she could not help making comparisons between her and the noble young creature up-stairs, and decided from that moment that Grace was an impossible wife for her son.

Poor Clara suffered terribly through the night, and the doctor remained with her, and endeavored to give her all the relief in his power. Mrs. Mordaunt did not leave her either, and when she saw with what heroism she bore her sufferings, and how anxious she was not to give trouble, she felt so much drawn toward her that she began to understand and reciprocate Jack's interest in the girl, and to pray earnestly that her life might be spared.

But for hours this seemed a forlorn hope, Clara's nerves seemed so completely unstrung, and her strength so exhausted. However, toward noon the next day the laudanum began to take effect, and she was able to sleep. Mrs. Mordaunt left her then, and went down to get a little refreshment. On the stairs she met Jack, looking terribly haggard and anxious.

"Is she better, mother? Will she live?" he inquired, breathlessly.

"I hope she is better, Jack, but no one can tell as yet. She is young, poor child! and that is her best chance."

"What does Dr. Leonard say?"

"Just what I say. I am quoting his words."

"Mother," added Jack, impressively, "she must be saved! It would be horrible if she were to die! I should feel as if I were her murderer!"

"You? Oh, no!"

"But I should, for it was through my carelessness that the house was burnt. Let us telegraph to town for Sir John Parker. We can not do too much for her."

"I know that; and when I suggested to Dr. Leonard that we should have further advice, he told me it was perfectly unnecessary; and as he is a conscientious man, I am sure he would not say so unless it were true."

"I don't think he would," Captain Mordaunt admitted. "And yet I can't bear to be doing so little for her, when she was ready to give her life to save us sorrow, mother," he added abruptly. "Did you know that Grace Wimborne was all right?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Mordaunt, shortly.

"It seems that she quietly made sure of her own safety, and left the rest of you to do as you could."

"Who told you that?"

"No one; but I heard her mother reproach her for having deserted her, and Grace could not deny it, although she gave as her excuse that she had no time to go back and fetch anybody, and thought it was better one person should be saved than none."

Mrs. Mordaunt's silence was more expressive than words. Presently she asked where Grace was then.

"She has gone home with her mother and Anastasia. Lady Wimborne begged me to tell you that her nerves were so terribly shaken she could not be of any use, and therefore thought it better to get out of our way. She will send a groom over in the afternoon to inquire after us," concluded Jack, with an undefinable smile.

Mrs. Mordaunt shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"Most attentive and kind, I am sure! Was that all?"

"Not quite. Anastasia had the grace to ask if she could be of any use if she stayed behind. She also added that she should not easily forget Miss Tremlowe's kindness, and did I think she would like some grapes. I declined both her offers, for though Anastasia is the best of the three, I don't think she would be of much use in a sick-room."

"None whatever," replied Mrs. Mordaunt, decidedly. "I need not ask you, Jack, what you mean to do about Grace. She is utterly unworthy of an honest man's love."

"I would rather die than marry her!" he answered, with almost fierce emphasis. "She has no more heart than a jellyfish!"

"You are quite right. As long as I live I shall never get over the recollection of her, as she lay by the fire this morning, sleeping as calmly as if nothing had happened, although she had left her mother and sister, and all of us, in the burning house, and did not know that we were alive!"

"I fancy that being alive herself was enough for Grace's happiness—the rest was our affair! I have always noticed that intensely selfish people are very happy. And, indeed, why shouldn't they be? As long as the world treats them pretty well, individually they see nothing to grieve for. However, I am very much obliged to Grace for giving me such an excellent excuse for breaking off our engagement, for in truth, mother, it has been a sore affliction to me."

"How came you to ask her, then?"

"I can hardly tell you. I was an egregious, unmitigated fool—that is all! But you liked Grace, mother, and there is a good deal in a woman's being determined to have you."

"I suppose there is," replied Mrs. Mordaunt. "I am fain to confess that I did like Grace. I thought her a cheerful, amiable girl, who would make your home agreeable. And, you see, her position and fortune were so suitable—"

"Exactly: these things influenced you in spite of yourself, mother. If Grace had been only a governess, you would soon have discovered that she was shallow and selfish; but because she was a baronet's daughter and had a good dowry, she has had the credit of virtues she did not possess. However, thank goodness our eyes have been opened before it is too late. The next time I engage myself, it will be to a woman I love wholly and entirely, without any reference to the suitability of her fortune or position."

"I trust she may be a lady, Jack—that is all."

"I could not love any one who wasn't a lady in mind and manners, mother; and the rest is not of much consequence, since, as my wife, she will have my position. Anyhow, I think you will be satisfied with my choice, and find that by taking a wife I have also given you a daughter."

"Jack, I can see by your manner that you are thinking of some one in particular."

"Perhaps I am; but as I am sure she is not thinking of me at present, it would be presumptuous to mention her name. But I promise you you shall not be kept in the dark when there is anything to tell."

And then he bent down and kissed her, and Mrs. Mordaunt went back to her post, greatly cheered and comforted.

Decidedly the Wimbornes were shrewd people. We may suppose that her ladyship was not exactly charmed with the treatment she had received from Grace, and that there were a few little recriminations in the strict privacy of domestic life; but, at any rate, she determined to put a good face upon the matter to outsiders.

Moreover, she resolved that, since a separation between Jack and Grace was inevitable, the latter should have all the credit of the rupture. Therefore, with a basket of hothouse grapes for the sick girl came also two letters from Lady Wimborne—one to Mrs. Mordaunt, full of excuses and regrets, etc.; the other to Jack—and about as clever an epistle as you would wish to see:

"Dear Grace (it ran) was in such an agitated state, and her nerves were so shattered, that she could not write to him herself, as she had wished to do; but she thought it best there should be no delay, and therefore had begged her, Lady Wimborne, to undertake the painful task. She thought it must be needless for her to say that the dear child was of a peculiarly sensitive, timid disposition, and after the frightful supernatural warnings she had received during her stay at the Hall, and the mysterious destruction of the house itself, she would always feel that a curse rested on the Mordaunt family, and live in perpetual fear. After a good deal of anxious thought, therefore, she had decided it would be better to give up the engagement; and she was sure Captain Mordaunt would give her dear child credit for the purest and most disinterested motives for this decision. The events of that terrible night had been such a shock to them all that they required an entire change, and were starting for Paris on the morrow. But she begged Captain Mordaunt to believe that, wherever she might be, no one would ever feel a deeper interest in his fate than his sincere friend,

WILHELMINA WIMBORNE."

"There's a clever woman for you, mother!" said Jack, laughing, as he tossed his letter to Mrs. Mordaunt. "She would have made a splendid diplomatist. Do you know, I feel like Sinbad, the Sailor when he had got rid of the Old Man of the Sea, I am free of such a heavy load. I don't care a straw about the old place now, for if it hadn't been burnt down I should have married Grace Wimborne, and been the most miserable man under the sun; whereas now, thank Heaven! I am my own master again, and can make profit out of the lesson I have received. I shall sell out directly, and begin to build. Meanwhile, you have your jointure house, and will be able to board and lodge me until I get a home of my own. I am sure we shall be very jolly, mother, and you have been wanting me to settle and economize for an age, you know."

"But won't building be rather an expensive piece of economy?"

"Well, there will be the price of my commission, and I shall sell some of my horses, then I can manage on fifteen or sixteen hundred this year, and put all the rest of my income into the building fund. At that rate I shall start clear in my new home next year, and if I can't live comfortably, and save for the youngsters too, on eight thousand pounds a year, I deserve to be hanged."

"What youngsters?" said Mrs. Mordaunt, in a surprised tone.

Jack laughed, and colored too.

"I was counting my chickens before they were hatched, mother, that was all. The youngsters are not impossible—only premature."

Jack would hardly have been so cheerful, perhaps, in spite of his release, only that Doctor Leonard had given a much more satisfactory account of Clara Tremlowe that afternoon, and seemed to think there could be no doubt of her pulling through now, with ordinary care.

Her lovely hair was sadly charred, but that would grow again, and there was no scar on her face. Indeed, she was more shaken than burnt, and it was the effect of the nervous shock, in her debilitated state of health, that Doctor Leonard had feared.

But she had rallied more quickly than he could have hoped, and had already taken a decided turn for the better.

Mrs. Mordaunt nursed her herself; first of all for duty's sake, but very soon from real affection and regard. It was impossible to be much with Clara and not love her, she was so gentle. Then she was so touched by the elder woman's kindness, forgetting that she had earned it by saving little Mary's life. But she counted her own services such a small thing, while she seemed overwhelmed at the magnitude of the services she received from others.

Sometimes she would put her arms round Mrs. Mordaunt's neck, and say, "How good you are to me! I feel sometimes, when you are leaning over me and smoothing my pillow, as if you were my own dear mother; and yet I shall never be able to do anything to show you how grateful I am."

"My dear child, you paid your debt three times over in advance by saving Mary's life."

"I wish you wouldn't talk about that, please. Anybody would have done as I did."

Mrs. Mordaunt thought of Grace Wimborne, and shook her head.

"Indeed, they would not; but, as you don't like to be praised, we will say no more about it. However, we can think what we like, can't we?"

Directly Miss Tremlowe was well enough to be moved. Mrs. Mordaunt took possession of the house which her husband had built for her, in order that she might feel independent at their son's marriage.

Having an idea that he might bring a wife home at any time, Mrs. Mordaunt would never let The Grange, and therefore it only needed to be swept, furnished, and aired to be ready to receive her and her party.

Jack thought the drawing-room looked very home-like and pleasant when he came from his walk the first evening, and saw Clara's sweet, pale face resting on a crimson cushion close to the fire, while Mary sat at her feet, and Mrs. Mordaunt smiled benevolently at them both from an opposite couch.

He came in rubbing his hands cheerily, bringing an agreeable whiff of the outer freshness with him, and tossed a bunch of violets into little Mary's lap.

"Those are for the invalid," he said, smiling softly at Clara; "but Mary will want to give them, of course."

"No, I sha'n't, uncle Jack, if they are your present," spoke up Mary, who had a very strong sense of justice; "but I will try and get Miss Tremlowe some to-morrow all to myself."

Clara took the violets with a faint blush.

"Thank you very much," she said. "They are delightfully sweet. But I mustn't be called an invalid any more, if you please. Mary and I are going to begin lessons again next week."

"Mother, what do you say to that?" inquired Jack, turning to Mrs. Mordaunt.

"We shall see when next week comes. How does your building go on?"

"Splendidly! The house will be quite ready for occupation in eight months' time, since you are so anxious to get rid of me, mother."

"I am afraid by that time, my dear, you will be very tired of us."

"We shall see," he answered gayly. "So far, I like myself very much, as the servants say, and am in no hurry to change my situation."

Every day Clara improved, until she was able to go out-doors and enjoy the spring sunshine and perfumed air. It was Jack who always pushed her chair along the garden-paths; and though Mrs. Mordaunt invariably made one of the party, she looked as if she had come to please herself, and not to play propriety.

But, on one occasion, Mrs. Mordaunt was called in to see a visitor, and as Mary was not in attendance as usual, Jack found himself alone with the lady of his love.

For there had never been any disguise in his own mind about his affection for Clara Tremlowe since the night of the fire, and each day he had become more and more certain that she was the only woman he would ever care to have for his wife.

If he had not asked her yet, it was only because he thought that she ought not to be agitated while she continued so weak. No man was less of a coxcomb than Jack Mordaunt, in spite of his successes; and yet he could not help thinking that Clara liked him a little, and that it would not be very difficult to coax an affirmative from her sweet, coy lips.

There was a lovely flush on her face to-day, which looked brighter than he had ever seen it yet; for Clara had good news from her dear ones abroad, and began to hope now that her sister would be eventually restored to health.

And then it was such a delightful afternoon, and Jack had filled her lap with early flowers, enjoying her enthusiasm as much as she enjoyed her bouquet. He wheeled her through the shrubbery to the croquet lawn, which was sunny and sheltered both, and had the extra advantage, to his mind, of not being overlooked from the house.

Here he came to a standstill, and sat down by her side on a garden seat, watching her with tender, wistful eyes. His silence surprised Clara, and she looked up presently, then drooped her eyelids quickly, while a burning blush crept up to the very edge of the little golden rings that had taken the place of her thick braids, and made her look so childlike and fair.

Jack knew that he was understood then, and laid his strong hand gently down on her fluttering fingers.

"Clara," he said, in a simple, straightforward, manly way, "I love you, dear! Will you be my wife?"

She hesitated for a moment, growing very pale; and then she answered, in an agitated voice, "I never dreamt of this, Captain Mordaunt, and am very sorry you should have

spoken such words to me, who am only a dependent in your mother's house; but I am not likely, fortunately, to be tempted from my duty by fair promises and fair words; for—for I knew May, the girl whom you once loved and deserted."

Jack staggered as if he had received a blow, but he spoke up bravely, too.

"I was very wrong there—I will not even attempt to extenuate my fault; but I hope you will believe me when I say that, on my return from Norway, I went straight to the little farm-house where May had been staying, and they refused to give me even her name, much more her address. They declared that they had their orders to that effect."

"I know they had. She saw, when you went away, that you had only been trifling with her, and did not choose to give you another opportunity of making sport for yourself at her expense."

"Oh, Clara! you are too hard upon me. I swear to you that I was truly attached to her, and never ceased to regret my conduct. But you must remember that a man brought up as I have been has certain prejudices he finds it difficult to overcome; and gentle and refined as May was, how could I tell that she was a lady?"

"You could not, because she was poor, I suppose," said Clara, with a choking voice.

"No; I hope I'm not such a snob as that. But she was living alone, away from her friends, in a peculiar position—"

"She was alone, because the change was necessary for her, and her friends could not afford to accompany her, that was all," interrupted Miss Tremlowe. "But being solitary and unprotected, she had a greater claim on your chivalry."

"I never forgot the respect that was due to her for a moment. I loved her dearly at that time, but I must own struggled against the feeling, because I knew that there would be difficulties at home."

"And yet I am as poor as May; and you asked me just now to be your wife!"

"Yes; but I love you differently, and far more. Besides, I know you to be a gentlewoman, and I am sure that my mother would welcome you as a daughter. Even if I doubted this, I should not hesitate, for I love you so truly, so passionately, so entirely, Clara, that I can not live without you!"

His hand closed over hers again, but she moved it away.

"It is May who has a right to your love, Captain Mordaunt, not I. I can not take her place."

"But I tell you that I do not know where to find her."

"I can help you there," replied Clara; "and moreover, I must tell you that your cruel desertion brought her to death's door. She is still very delicate; but the sight of you might restore her to hope and, therefore, to life. Will you atone for the wrong you once did her?"

"Would it be an atonement to offer her simply my name when I have no heart to give?"

"The very sight of her would bring back the old love," answered Clara, eagerly. "She is so good, so gentle, so devoted, the hardest-hearted man in the world could not resist her."

"I honestly believe she is all that; but I see now that what I felt for her was more brotherly affection and interest than love. I might never have found this out if I had not seen you, Clara; but, having found it out, it would surely be a new wrong to May if I asked her to be my wife."

"You would love her again when you saw her."

"Never in that way," he answered, with great decision. "I know myself better than I did, and have bought my knowledge too painfully ever to make any new mistakes. If I were to marry May, she would be a miserable woman; for how could she fail to see that the old love was dead and gone—or, rather, had never actually existed in that sense?"

Clara looked sorrowful and perplexed. She was ready to sacrifice herself and all her dearest hopes in order to do justice to May; but, as Captain Mordaunt put the matter, it seemed to her that while she lost so much, May would gain nothing but a perpetual heart-ache.

And yet, to take May's place, and queen it where she would have been despised, was impossible; although every pulse of her heart, every fiber of her being, pleaded for Jack, and she knew that it was her life-long happiness she was casting away for duty's sake.

He was watching her eagerly, and seeing by her face what a conflict of feeling was raging in her heart, hoped that the battle would end in

a victory for him, and ventured to draw closer again. But he did not know Clara Tremlowe. Although she looked so soft and pliable she would rather have died than yielded unless her conscience approved.

Of course, Jack must not marry May, as he did not love her; but it was equally certain that she must not, since the only chance for poor May now was to let her forget Captain Mordaunt's very existence.

So she steeled herself to say, "I would not have you marry May, if she would be a miserable woman, for she has suffered enough already, poor thing; but I should be a miserable woman also, if I usurped her place. Moreover, how could I have any faith in your constancy?"

"Why not?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"Two months ago you were engaged to Grace Wimbome, remember!"

"You know the whole history of that foolish engagement, Clara; and how bitterly I repented of it."

"It seems to me you are always making love to women, and then repenting of it," she said, almost bitterly. "Two or three months hence you will regret the words you have spoken to me to-day."

"You know better than that, Clara, although you choose to torture me. If you will not have me, I swear solemnly I will never have a wife at all."

"Do not make any rash vows, Captain Mordaunt; it is so easy always for men to forget."

"I have never found it so," he answered, sadly. "I beseech you, Clara, to think better of your refusal. I can make you happy, I feel that; and oh, my darling, I love you so dearly!"

He bent forward until his breath fanned her cheek—his eager, passionate eyes searching hers for a gleam of answering love; and, greatly moved herself, she sunk back in her chair pale and terrified, feeling as if temptation were beyond her strength to resist, and that she must listen to the pleadings of her own heart, even if they made her unfaithful to May.

"You cannot say that you hate me," he went on, triumphantly, reading her face as it were an open book. "And if you love me, you shall not deny me. Clara, do you hear, child?"

"Yes, I hear," she answered, faintly. "Let me go, Captain Mordaunt!"—for he had seized fast hold of her hands, and was covering them with kisses. "You don't understand—it is impossible that I should ever be your wife!"

"I don't believe in impossibilities. Why should you be so cruel as to condemn me altogether for a fault that I have honestly confessed and earnestly repented of? You see yourself that there would be nothing gained now by my marrying May—and it is you I love with all my heart and strength. I can answer for your receiving a warm welcome from my mother, and there is nothing to hinder our happiness but—"

"But May!" she put in quickly.

"I am positive May would not wish that herself, Clara. Anyhow, I am sure that she would forgive me if she knew that I came back from Norway resolved to do what was right by her, although by that time I was beginning to doubt whether my love for her was all that I had supposed it to be while I lay at her feet in the woods, talking sentiment, and smiling into her eyes, and felt I could hardly build up my whole future happily on a mere summer fancy. Still, I should have done it, on my honor; and the good resolution ought to count for something, since it was not my fault that it was never carried out."

She shook her head—not angrily this time, but sorrowfully.

"It is too late now. I wish I had never come to this place."

"Whatever happens, I shall never say that, dearest, for loving you has made me a better man. Complete the work you have begun, Clara—that is all I ask." And he folded his arms about her, yearningly. "My sweetest, you could not say no if you only knew how I loved you!"

She broke from him, with a cry of despair.

"You won't understand," she said, "and it is too cruel! I am May's sister!"

And without daring to look at him, she cast off her wraps, and fled toward the house.

CHAPTER IX.

VANISHED.

CLARA retired to her room directly she got in, and locking her door, flung herself on the bed, and sobbed as if her heart would break. She did not know how much she loved Jack until she had to deny him; and to have to re-

sign such happiness as he offered was cruelly hard, because, after all, she could do May no real good by her self-sacrifice.

But she could save her pain, and that was something gained, considering how sorrowful her life had been of late. So Clara tried to comfort herself, feeling all the while the most miserable creature under the sun.

She excused herself from going down to dinner, on the plea of a bad headache; and knowing this was still delicate, Mrs. Mordaunt accepted the excuse. But when she saw how thoroughly wretched her son looked she began to think there must be some connection between the two above facts, and being alone with Jack over the fire that evening, she questioned him affectionately.

It was such a relief to talk that Jack blurted out the whole truth; adding, as he flung himself back in his chair with a despairing sigh, "The worst of it is she will never marry me, mother, for it will always seem to her that I am May's murderer!"

"But May is not dead, Jack."

"She will die, I am afraid. And if she were to live, Clara would think she had all the greater need to sacrifice herself to save her pain. You see, I have no chance any way."

"I am not so sure of that. If May were to get well, and become attached to another man, Clara would be able to follow the dictates of her own heart; and I think she likes you, Jack."

Jack smiled grimly.

"She has an odd way of showing it, then."

"Well, she wants to do justice to May rather than herself; and we must needs respect her feeling, even if it be a mistaken one. But keep up your spirits, Jack, and I will have a long talk with her to-morrow. She would be more likely to listen to me than to you, because, of course, you are a very interested adviser."

"I would scorn to lead her an inch astray, mother, even for my own advantage."

"I am sure you would, Jack; but, when we desire a thing greatly, we are apt to persuade ourselves it is right, and, therefore, it is impossible to rely on our judgment. Clara is of a peculiarly nervous, sensitive organization, and though indulgent to others, is very strict with herself. But have patience, and I think all will come right in the end."

"It would not be hard to wait if only I had a little hope," he said, mournfully.

"Wait, and that will come. Clara is so sensible and warm-hearted, I am sure a night's reflection will show her there is no need for her to make a martyr of herself; and if she still persists in her resolution, we may, perhaps, find an ally in May herself. At any rate, as I said before, you must be patient. Mrs. Tremlowe returns to England in about a month, and I cannot help fancying she will be on your side."

"I trust she may be," sighed Jack; and relapsed into silence again, casting many a mournful glance at Clara's vacant chair, and wondering how it would be possible to bear his life without her.

This problem had to be solved sooner than he had feared, for in the morning, when Mrs. Mordaunt went to Clara's room, the governess was gone, leaving a letter on her toilet table, in which she spoke affectionately and gratefully of all the kindness she had received, and expressed her regret that circumstances had forced her to leave The Grange at once, and forever.

"My dear Jack," said Mrs. Mordaunt, as she showed this letter to her son, "Clara loves you, or she would not have gone away. We never fly before a temptation we know we can resist. Let us go and fetch her home."

"Do you know where she has gone?"

"To her mother's, of course."

"Had she money enough, think you, for such a long journey?"

"Ample; for finding she refused to accept her quarter's salary, on the plea that she had not earned it, I put a ten-pound note in her purse yesterday morning."

"Would that be enough for her purpose?"

"With what she had already, it would be more than enough. It is not such a very expensive journey from here to Florence. If we only knew what route she had taken, we might catch her half-way."

"And then?" inquired Jack, wistfully.

"Then I think we might possibly persuade her to return with us."

"I doubt it. Still, we ought to go, mother; for Clara is too young and beautiful to be wandering about the world alone. Then, of course, it is I who drove her away."

"You paid her the greatest compliment a man can pay to a woman, Jack."

"Anyhow, she didn't appreciate it much," responded Jack, dryly. "Another time I shall have to be less complimentary."

Jack was prompt and energetic, and, as a bachelor, was not much troubled with impedimenta, so that all his preparations for the journey were soon made.

Mrs. Mordaunt took only one dress, besides the one she was wearing, and left her maid behind. Therefore, in two hours they were ready to start, and were fortunate enough to catch the boat train on reaching Charing Cross, arriving in Paris at eleven o'clock that night.

But they simply passed through, and on to Dijon, traveling all night, but managing to get quite as much sleep as was necessary in the carriage.

At every place they stopped Jack looked out anxiously, but either Clara had gone by a different route or had made good use of her few hours' start, for they saw no sign of her, and none of the officials remembered to have noticed a young lady alone at any of the stations where they changed.

Still, Jack was quite hopeful; although, as he neared Florence, he began to look a little nervous, as if he rather dreaded the meeting with May. They went straight to a hotel, and after a bath and some refreshment took a carriage, and drove off to the little villa where Mrs. Tremlowe and her elder daughter were lodging.

The door stood open, and as they approached they heard a voice that sounded like Clara's, singing a low, sweet Italian song, which was deepened and enriched every now and then by a few bass notes, which melted tenderly into hers, as if their lips were not very far apart, or their hearts either.

Jack grew very pale, and looked inquiringly at his mother.

"I am afraid we shall be in the way," he said, rather huskily. "Perhaps we had better go back to the hotel, and just write to Mrs. Tremlowe."

"Nonsense, my dear! I came here to see her, and I mean to see her. She left Clara in my charge, and I should not like her to think that I had deserted my trust."

"I should suppose Clara will do you justice, mother?"

"She may prefer to be silent," answered Mrs. Mordaunt, as she tapped at the door; and finding no one attending to her, presently walked in, Jack following, despite himself.

A girl was seated at the piano with her back toward them, while a tall, dark, foreign-looking man was leaning against the instrument, and gazing into her face with very loving eyes. Mrs. Mordaunt thought it was impossible to mistake the slight, graceful figure, and golden-brown hair. But when she said, "Oh, Clara!" reproachfully, and the girl turned round on the spot, she saw that this must needs be Clara's sister—since it was not Clara herself, and yet there was a certain likeness between them.

And May recognized Jack, of course, and said, in the calmest, coolest sort of way, as she held out her hand, "How do you do, Captain Mordaunt?"

Jack, who was a man of the world, recovered from his confusion in a moment, and taking her tone, asked politely after her health, and introduced her to his mother. May bowed, and introduced Signor Gardoni in her turn.

Then there was an unpleasant pause, which showed that they were none of them quite so much at their ease as they pretended. It was broken by Mrs. Mordaunt inquiring after Clara.

"Clara!" exclaimed May, growing suddenly pale. "Isn't she with you?"

Mrs. Mordaunt explained as much as she dared, and May became very agitated and overcame.

"Poor Clara is so nervous and sensitive," she said, "and my state of health troubled her so much that she could not rest. But we hoped the entire change of scene, and pleasant occupation, would keep her from brooding over her troubles; and indeed, as I told her the last time I wrote, there is no need to be anxious about me now, as I am getting well very fast indeed."

"She fancies you tell her these things to reassure her."

"We may have done so in the early days, for, whenever she was specially worried, she used to wander about the house and grounds in her sleep, poor girl! and we were always so afraid she would injure herself in some way. The doctors say she will get rid of this unfortunate habit directly her nerves become stronger; but, of course, all the while she kept worrying about me there was not much chance for that."

"Did she know that she was a somnambulist?" inquired Jack, to whom this statement was a

revelation and an explanation, both, of many things that had pained and puzzled him.

"She didn't at one time; but I am afraid she suspects it now, for she wrote to us that the night of the fire she found herself in an unoccupied part of the house, where she had never been awake, and was so frightened that she fled shrieking to her own room. She fancied at first, that she might have taken a candle with her, and dropped it, as the fire proceeded from the west wing. But I believe it was your doing; was it not?"

"Yes; I mentioned that to my mother, and the household generally, for fear any one else might get the credit of the accident."

"That was only right. And now about Clara; if she has left you, she has probably joined mamma in London."

"Mrs. Tremlowe is in town, then?"

"She went four days ago. An uncle of ours in India has just died, and has left mamma everything. We don't quite know yet what his fortune was, but his lawyer tells us we shall be very well off, and wished to see mother at once. As Signor Gardoni's mother has the next villa, and promised to take care of me, mamma started that very night, taking the short route through the Mont Cenis Tunnel; and, therefore, she will have arrived in London the night before last."

"Where I trust we may see her," said Mrs. Mordaunt, gravely. "We shall leave Florence to-morrow morning. I suppose you would not care to accompany us, Miss Tremlowe?"

"Oh, no!" answered May, quickly, and with a bright blush. "I shall be very happy here until mamma's return, and I have no doubt she will bring dear Clara back with her."

"Not if I can help it," thought Jack; and he took a cordial leave of May and of the handsome foreigner, feeling as if he owed the latter a debt of gratitude he should find it difficult ever to repay.

Three days later they reached London, and went direct to Mrs. Tremlowe's lodgings, where they found both mother and daughter.

Clara looked very pale, they noticed, as the door opened; but, at the sight of them, she flushed vividly, and hung her head. She evidently thought that Mrs. Mordaunt would resent her flight; but the only reproach she ever heard from those kind lips was "Foolish Clara!" And then she kissed the girl affectionately, and peace was made.

Later in the evening Jack and Clara were alone (perhaps the two mothers had put their heads together, and managed this for Jack); and then he took her hand, and said, in his most persuasive accents, "You see, Clara, there is no need to sacrifice yourself for May now; and, since you are so fond of making a martyr of yourself, suppose you do violence to your feelings, and marry me?" Then he added, with as much tenderness as gravity, "I promise you, darling, you shall never regret it; and, surely, it will console you for your self-abnegation to feel that you have made one person in the world so happy."

Clara looked down, and toyed nervously with the locket at her throat.

"I am afraid to trust you," she said. "How can I tell that this is not also a summer fancy?"

"Come, Clara, you know better than that! I shall love you in life, and long for you in death. You are all my world—all my hope—my one single thought and care; how could I be unfaithful, then? But you say this to torture me, for you trust me in your heart."

That was true enough; and as Clara really wanted to say yes, and was only denying him out of coyness now, she let Jack draw her closer and closer, until she found herself suddenly in his arms, with her lips under his; and then, finding he would not let her go again, she resigned herself to her fate.

The county was very much surprised, and rather indignant, when it heard that Jack was going to marry Mary's governess; but when they were further informed that she was related to the Mordaunts, and had, moreover, a nice little fortune of twenty thousand pounds, they decided that the affair was much better than they had supposed, and they should certainly call upon young Mrs. Mordaunt when she took up her abode at the new Hall.

May was married on the same day as Clara; and the only rivalry between the sisters in after days was as to which had the best husband, or which were the handsomer, fair children or dark.

Jack takes great credit to himself that his wife no longer walks in her sleep, nor seems to be troubled with nerves; saucily declaring that he does not believe for a moment Clara's state

of mind and health at that time was caused by her anxiety for May, nor that she scared Grace Wimborne away in her sister's interest. And as Clara is very much afraid she did begin to love Jack directly she saw his kind, handsome, pleasant face, and might, therefore, have felt the influence of this prejudice even in her sleep, she just laughs and blushes, and reminds him that it would have been very presumptuous of Mary's governess to have fallen in love with Mary's uncle, only that it is in the nature of Guardsmen to be vain; and, of course, as his wife she is bound to make the best of his faults.

THE END.

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